

Advancing student wellness through layered nutrition approaches

AT A GLANCE

Students benefit from cooking classes, poster board nutrition messaging, Healthy Harvest and mobile markets.

The Situation

Hands-on food preparation plays an important role in building healthy habits. Cooking skills are increasingly recognized as a powerful strategy for preventing and reducing chronic diet-related diseases and obesity. Adolescents who participate in cooking education report significantly greater confidence in their abilities, stronger food preparation skills and more positive attitudes toward healthy eating. They also demonstrate higher overall diet quality and a greater likelihood of choosing nutritious foods.

Equally important, introducing fruits and vegetables in a positive, supportive environment helps shape lifelong healthy eaters. Colorful, inviting nutrition signage in cafeterias and hallways increases students' exposure to healthy foods, making them more likely to notice, consider and ultimately choose them. Together, these strategies create a school environment that reinforces healthy choices and supports students' long-term well-being.

Our Response

UI Extension family and consumer sciences faculty partnered with health teacher Anthony Hook and Venture Academy — Coeur d'Alene School District's



Students at Venture Academy chop vegetables to pair with their homemade hummus and bean dip they prepared in class.

alternative high school — to deliver a three-week nutrition and hands-on cooking program each trimester during the 2024-2025 school year. Using Eat Smart Idaho — approved curricula, students participated in engaging nutrition lessons and developed practical cooking skills. Each session concluded with a well-organized Exhibit Night where students proudly presented their scratch-made recipes to families and peers. Over the three years of this partnership, these Exhibit Nights have become highly anticipated and well-attended events that celebrate student learning and confidence in the kitchen.

To reinforce healthy behaviors beyond the classroom, Eat Smart Idaho continued its schoolwide environmental efforts for the second year by decorating five

bulletin boards with positive nutrition messages, including MyPlate, reducing sugary drinks and increasing fruit and vegetable intake.

New this year Eat Smart Idaho launched a seven-week Healthy Harvest tasting series at Venture Academy, introducing students to one new fruit or vegetable each week — such as rainbow carrots, purple cauliflower and pineapple. Students explored how the food grows, sampled each item in a supportive environment and shared how they might incorporate these foods into their daily routines.

Additionally, Venture Academy served as a host site for Second Harvest's Mobile Market program, providing thousands of pounds of fresh, healthy food to families in need through a convenient drive-through distribution.

Program Outcomes

Healthy Harvest results showed students at Venture High School really enjoying the fruit and vegetable offers with 100% liking the fresh salsa, carrot juice, rainbow carrots, pineapple and watermelon. 95% liking the purple cauliflower and cauliflower chips, 89% liking the sweet mini peppers and 83% liking the mini cucumbers. These results highlight the power of repeated, enjoyable taste-testing experiences to expand students' willingness to try and enjoy a wider variety of healthy foods.

Through four Second Harvest Mobile Markets at Venture High School, 1,024 families in the community gained access to healthy food, helping to address food insecurity and support overall well-being.

Venture High School Pre/Post Data: 21 participants

Improved their behaviors in	% change
Eating fruit	65%
Eating vegetables	55%
Drinking soda	15%
Eating whole grains	70%
Eating out healthier	60%
Reading nutrition labels	55%
Days per week physically active	80%
Muscle toning activities	60%
Physical activity frequency	63%
Washing hands	44%
Washing fruits and vegetable	58%
Separate cutting boards from meat and perishable products	47%
Foods in refrigerator with in 2 hours	32%
Compare food and drink choices	42%
Make own snacks	47%

The Future

Eat Smart Idaho will continue to collaborate with Venture High School for the 2025-2026 school year.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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