

4-H class gets students engaged in hands-on activities and off screens

AT A GLANCE

A school 4-H class replaces 7,560 hours of screen time with hands-on learning and makes students feel better about themselves and their school environment.

The Situation

Fernwaters Public Charter School has expanded to serve more students, now serving Kindergarten to 8th grade. Because of this rapid expansion and a state-wide teacher shortage (idahoednews.org), it was difficult to fill classrooms with traditional teachers and classes. Students had been filling class time with online learning through the Idaho Digital Learning Academy. To reduce screen time and increase hands-on skill development the school reached out to the University of Idaho Extension office in Lemhi County to offer a 4-H STEAM class.

Our Response

For the second year, University of Idaho Extension, Lemhi County, has been providing a twice-week class for Fernwaters students. In 2024-2025, 6th, 7th and 8th grade students participated. In 2025-2026, only 6th grade students participated. The class occurred during the fall semester with 34 classes covering 15 different topics. Topics included:

- Rocketry
- Ecosystems
- LEGO robotics



Sixth graders at Fernwaters Public Charter School make hummus during 4-H class. Photo by Katie McFarland.

- Jam making
- Pickle making
- Healthy snacks
- Bread making
- Sewing
- Crochet
- Dehydration
- Aerospace
- Electric circuits
- Crafting
- Cookie decorating
- Ice Cream in a bag

Students also filled out a record book and gave a demonstration at the end of class.

Program Outcomes

A post-class survey was given to all sixteen 6th grade students after the 2025-2026 class. Students reported their feelings on self-perception, school environment and hands-on learning. They reported a strong positive impact on both their engagement with school and their self-confidence. Over half of the students (nine of 16) reported that hands-on learning was really important and almost all (12 of the 16) students reported it was much easier to learn with hands-on activities. Half the students (eight of 16) stated they learned a lot of things while the others, almost half (seven of 16) reported

learning some things. Specifically, students reported that their favorite activities were hands-on, including cooking, learning practical skills and STEM projects. They also reported a general sense of enjoyment and positive classroom experience reporting that instructor relationship and classroom climate were key strengths of the class. In general, students loved the class, felt good about themselves and learned practical meaningful skills. Over two years, the class replaced 7,650 hours of screen time with hands on activities.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

- Fernwaters Public Charter School

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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