

## Cooking with Math

Top 20, Inc. received a grant from Franciscan Health Alliance to operate a pilot project during the 2022-2023 schoolyear in East Chicago, Indiana entitled "Cooking with Math." Top 20, Inc. is offering this program in collaboration with Purdue Extension's Nutrition Education Program (NEP).

The intent of the program is to: (1) help the students learn and understand measurement by preparing healthy recipes; (2) provide nutrition education and healthy meals to the students; (3) share nutrition information and recipes with the parents; (4) engage the students in a fun, educational activity; and, (5) benefit those students in the school system and their families that are food insecure.

Two schools were selected for the project, Carrie Gosch Early Learning Center (CGELC) and McKinley Elementary School. CGELC is a public preschool serving 3 to 5 year olds in 10 classrooms (about 132 students). Sixty-five percent of the students at CGELC are Title I eligible for free lunches. For this project we are working with three second grade classrooms at McKinley consisting of about 25 students each (or 75 students). Students at McKinley are 100% eligible for free lunches. This will result in approximately 207 students being served between the two (2) schools.

The teachers, using an age-appropriate curriculum, introduce the students to concepts of measurements/fractions. NEP supplements the curriculum with regular nutrition education classes with the teachers and students at both schools to teach them about food groups, nutritional values, how to read labels, and foods that should be avoided, eaten in moderation, or that are good for them.

Through the grant and other resources, a crock pot was purchased for each classroom participating in the program, along with mixing bowls, measuring spoons and cups, other utensils, and a food cart on wheels. The food cart is used to store staple items such as oil, salt and pepper, and the other accessories necessary for cooking. Every month, food kits are assembled for each recipe and provided to the classrooms. Teachers, with assistance of the students, cook the recipes that are tied to events going on each month of the year. For example, in October, Spanish Heritage Month, the students made enchiladas. In November, the planned recipe is slow cooker stuffing. The process of measuring the ingredients included in the recipes using measuring cups and spoons will be a fun way for fractional parts to be reinforced and visualized by the students. While the food is cooking, the teachers read a story to the students related to the event of the month and discuss its relevance and importance. This allows the children to associate the meal to a specific activity occurring in the month and to better understand the nutritional information that they were taught. The students are able to smell and view the food as it cooks in anticipation of the finished product. Before school is dismissed, the students eat the meal family style as a group in the classroom. The students complete a brief survey at the end of each cooking session to let us know if both the meal and process was enjoyed. The recipes are sent home with the students to prepare at another time.