



## LESSONS LEARNED FROM COOKING

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Story by Donna Baxter

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**Sixty enthusiastic cooks took part in Nixa Public Schools' second Student Iron Chef Competition featuring "the Battle of the Food Truck Mash-Up" Feb. 8 at Mathews Elementary.**

Organized by the School Health Advisory Council, the contest was a fun way to get people thinking about health and wellness in a different way, said Coordinator Chef Rob Corliss. "Last year was fabulous. How could we top that? But we definitely did it," Corliss said. "Displays were just amazing, and it's got kids excited about cooking in the kitchen." SHAC is trying to tackle health and wellness issues with kids in a creative way, not just passing on boring information, he said.

The competing kids consistently listed three things — they had fun, enjoyed working together with a team and learned valuable lessons about food and its preparation. Morgan Greene, Jennah Al-Roubaie, Macy Kopp and Aubrey Kopp all said they loved working with their teammates to create something good.

"I think it was basically teamwork. Just working together to create food in a way that incorporates everything is fun itself," Jennah said.

Macy said it was fun cooking with her sister, Aubrey, who said putting in the honey was the most fun.

Without notes, Lauren Tiffin recited her team's recipe. "This is homemade guacamole with tomatoes, cilantro, a little bit of honey, some salt, chili powder, garlic salt and the other secret ingredient that I can't remember its name (cumin)," she said.

All cooks experience problems with equipment from time to time; the Shocking Chefs were no exception. "Our plug's shot and it took us a while to figure out how to get it going. You could say we had technical difficulties," Philip Winter said.

"Even though it's sometimes hard, I really like to create something and afterward, the best part is you get to taste and eat it," teammate Evan Breuer said. Corliss commended the coaches who helped teams prepare the food and develop a lifelong skill of cooking at home.

SHAC Chairman Kevin Kopp deemed the event a success. "The excitement, creativity, and passion for cooking were very evident," said Kopp, also director of elementary education. "Our overall mission for the Nixa Iron Chef is to promote families cooking together, shopping for ingredients together and for students to have a greater understanding of flavorful foods." Student Iron Chef is the biggest event of the year, he said. "The goal is to inspire students to become connected to their food, acquire valuable lifetime culinary skills, encourage cooking with friends and family and learn how to develop flavors in a healthy way," Kopp said. "We will also be showcasing local food and farmers via our 'secret ingredients.'"

Teams had one hour to prepare the food, then present to the judges. Recipes were required to include two secret ingredients, ground cumin and honey.

Teams competed based on their ages. Kids in kindergarten through fourth grade made food truck-inspired cold dishes while fifth graders through high school seniors made food truck-inspired tacos.

Kopp said that healthier eating is one of SHAC's objectives. "We tend to eat healthier when we prepare food ourselves instead of going out to eat," said Kopp. "Hopefully we have encouraged and inspired these chefs to love the art and science of cooking."

Corliss said there is a possibility of some Iron Chef battles in the future with Ozark and other neighboring schools. "Let's start dreaming big with our Student Iron Chef because it's all about promoting our kids cooking at an early age," he said.

Read the original article [here](#).

### **Credits and acknowledgements**

: Dr. Kopp leader of Nixa SHAC (School Health Advisory Council) & Executive Director of Elementary Education for Nixa Public Schools; the entire SHAC committee; the team coaches whom supported the students and worked with them on their recipes, practice sessions and at the live event; the Nixa community for coming out & supporting this event; the support of the parents to encourage their kids to "go for it" as they developed their recipes and table decorations and Nixa Schools for hosting the event at Matthews Elementary