



Photos by Stan Sussina | The Journal Gazette

McKayla Anderson, center, youth well-being coach at Parkview Health, guides Miami Middle Schools students Xeriah Wilson, left, and Ka'Nasia Kelso through cooking pumpkin pancakes Tuesday morning.

Helpings of knowledge about nutrition served up at FWCS

7th graders cooking in hands-on course

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The Journal Gazette

The scent of pumpkin pancakes wafted through Miami Middle School Tuesday morning as seventh graders made — and then feasted on — the dish as part of a program designed to teach adolescents about nutrition.

As science classrooms bustled with students measuring and mixing ingredients before pouring the batter on electric skillets, officials said they hope the cooking lessons imparted over six days will set the Fort Wayne Community Schools students up for a healthy lifestyle.

Such a scene isn't just happening at Miami. All FWCS seventh graders are receiving cooking and nutrition lessons this spring, said Mary Hess, the district's health and wellness services director.

AT A GLANCE

These are among the topics and skills Fort Wayne Community Schools seventh graders are learning through a six-day cooking and nutrition program:

- Kitchen safety
- Cutting techniques
- How to wash and prep food
- How to measure ingredients
- How to read nutrition labels

"I love the idea," she said.

Packaging nutrition lessons into a hands-on experience is key because it boosts students' enthusiasm for the subject, Hess said. She noted the program is especially important for middle schoolers because they are gaining independence and starting to think about how they'll make choices for themselves.

Like the safe sleep and basic infant care courses provided to all FWCS eighth graders last fall, the district isn't offering

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Omine Sama cracks an egg into a bowl as he prepares pancakes during Tuesday's Health Living Active Living course. HEAL is a garden-to-table cooking and nutrition program teaching seventh-grade students basic cooking skills and the importance of healthy eating.

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these cooking lessons on its own.

The program is supported by a \$20,000 grant the St. Joseph Community Health Foundation received from the Indiana Department of Health, said Mary Tyndall of the foundation.

Through her role as one of the program's many classroom volunteers, Tyndall said she has watched students learn to peel and cut vegetables and try various fresh produce as they work their way through the children's version of the Our Healing Kitchen curriculum.

The lessons stem from the Healthy Eating Active Living program, a partnership of the community health foundation and Parkview Health.

Kathy Wehrle, a registered dietitian, helped develop the curriculum several years ago, not imagining it would someday be adapted for schools.

Along with providing nutrition lessons about food groups and health, she said, it focuses on incorporating more fruits and vegetables in meals.

Wehrle shared a statistic that underscores the importance of eating well - 80% of chronic disease is largely preventable, and the No. 1 risk of premature death and disability is related to diet.

Recognizing seventh graders likely aren't interested in chronic disease, Wehrle said there's other reasons why they should care about proper diets. Students learn better and focus more when they eat better, she said.

Students Arianna Hosler and Braylon Hudson Heath - who talked about learning to measure ingredients and to hold knives properly - agreed that more schools should offer the program. It comes with tasty results.

The pumpkin pancakes were, Hosler said, delicious.

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