

Cooking Matters at Sunrise

Sunrise Elementary School

Aurora, CO



Sunrise Elementary School, located in Aurora, is part of the Cherry Creek School District (CCSD). Sunrise has a diverse student community, approximately 60% of whom qualify for free or reduced lunch. During the 2019-20 school year, Sunrise staff sought to engage families in new ways. Enter Cooking Matters!

The goal of Cooking Matters is to partner with families and caregivers through high-quality nutrition education. Cooking Matters is responsible for orchestrating the food, instruction, and materials for the course while the school was responsible for recruiting families/participants and providing the space, childcare, and translation.

The program coordinator, Title I CCSD coordinator, and the assistant principal collaborated to make the program come together. The goal was to have 10-12 participants. The team identified families that had an older student with siblings in younger grades and reached out to those parents, describing the program and surveying their interest. All of the families contacted were interested! The school took advantage of having a brand-new innovation space, specifically the maker space. It had a sink and butcher-block tables that were convenient and just what the class needed.

Sunrise's partnership with Cooking Matters helped the school achieve a Unified Improvement Plan goal—to increase family engagement. The cooking course allowed the students and parents to try new tasks with guidance. This increased their knowledge on healthier lifestyle choices by creating meals they may not typically prepare the same way or enjoy. The parents received tips, food, and a gift card to help support these new practices. The feedback from families was quite positive. They overwhelmingly enjoyed this opportunity. Students spoke about it in school and some of their peers were hoping to get involved if it were to occur again.

One of the biggest hurdles that the Sunrise planning team encountered was getting families to be able to commit for the full 6 weeks. There were work schedule changes, sports conflicts, a snow day, and other typical life events that came up. In the end, three of the five families consistently committed and made it to the end.

Sunrise's family liaison shares the following advice for other schools wanting to conduct a similar activity: "I would invite an extra family or two when beginning the class, simply so more people can utilize the opportunity if others are not able to fully commit."