

‘Veggie Wars’ Middle schoolers develop a taste for healthy eating

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Bloomfield Hills Middle School is working with Chef Johnny Prep to change students' attitudes toward eating and health.

It all started with “Veggie Wars” — a joint effort between the school and the nonprofit organization Quality for Kids (Q4K) that got national attention.

The result was the consumption of vegetables during school lunch hour at the school increased by a factor of 10. The increase was primarily due to kids getting other kids to eat healthy.

Following up on the success and working with Prep, a group of graduate students at the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan surveyed 1,100 middle school students to understand what would get students interested in healthy eating and cooking.

The concept of the “Clash of the Cooking Crews” was born when results showed

that more than 40 percent of middle school student have an interest in participating in a healthy cooking competition between schools.

The Clash of the Cooking Crews program learned from the challenges of the American Revolution Program popularized by Chef Jimmy Oliver. The key to the Clash of the Cooking Crews program is making it popular for kids to eat healthy. It is not adversarial with a school's food service program. They can either participate or not. Working with



middle school instead of high school students, it focuses on getting kids to influence their peers in making the choice to eat healthier. The basic concepts of the program were developed, tested and put in place at Bloomfield Hills Middle School.



Henry Ford Hospital in West Bloomfield will host the first Clash of the Cooking Crews competition June 1 at its stadium kitchen and facility on Maple Road. Several schools will be participating. Other schools interested in competing can contact Prep at johnnyprep@comcast.net. A handful of kids and adult sponsorship is all that is required. Students have a chance to win concert tickets, sporting event tickets and other gift certificates.

Prep, a television personality, cookbook author and children's nutrition advocate, will assist interested schools to prepare for the Clash of Cooking Crews and assist with each school's efforts to get students active in eating healthy. A

graduate of the University of Michigan with a degree in engineering (he also played offensive guard on the Wolverines football team) and later automotive supplier executive prior to becoming a chef, Prep understands the need for greater emphasis on science, technology and math education in order for today's students to succeed in the 21st century. That's why he said he turned his attention to sparking a movement in the local school system that promotes these real-life problem-solving and critical thinking skills through the lens of child nutrition.

For the competition, each school's Cooking Crew develops three recipes, with the competition organized into Throw Downs: a breakfast item, a lunch item and a snack. Bloomfield Hills Middle School has a club of students getting ready for the competition. Recently they were working on creating a breakfast fruit parfait.

The students were instructed how to make a base recipe for granola, muesli and parfait assembly. They then enhanced these recipes to their own creative designs with the requirements of meeting nutritional guidelines and starting with fresh ingredients. The parfaits the students

have come up with have been tasty, beautiful and nutritious.

Bloomfield Hills Middle School Principal Kaarin Averill sums up the philosophy of the school's cooking club: "I think the club is important because when kids cook their own food, they are more likely to buy into eating healthy recipes and to continue to prepare them for themselves or even their families.

Peers also have more influence on other peers than adults sometimes do, so if a student tells another student that a particular healthy food item tastes good, they are more likely to try it. What we are trying to do here is to make it popular and cool to eat a healthy diet, and to get teens to convince other teens that they can prepare and choose healthy selections that taste great."