

PRESS RELEASE



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Students Compete in Healthy Cooking Contest Create Change for School Food

Winning lunch will be served in all Chicago Public Schools; Applegate Farms sponsors

Chicago, Sept. 5, 2007 – In lunchrooms around the country, kids aren't shy about voicing their ideas for how school lunches would be *way* better if only they were in charge. Now high school students studying culinary arts at public schools in Chicago will have their chance.

Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC) is pleased to announce Cooking up Change 2007, HSC's 5th annual benefit, and the launch of a new Healthy Cooking Contest for high school students enrolled in the Chicago Public Schools culinary arts program. The city-wide contest will culminate with judging and awards at the benefit on October 18 at Salvage One in Chicago, and the winning entrée will be served as a school lunch in all of the city's public schools.

"It's exciting for the kids to be involved in crafting healthy lunches because this issue affects their health so directly," said Rochelle Davis, HSC's founding executive director. "With Cooking up Change, we're bringing together students, chefs, families and a great variety of advocates to highlight the ways we can work together to create meaningful change for school food."

Teams of students from 17 high schools will compete in categories for appetizers, desserts, and school lunch. The appetizers and desserts will be served at the benefit, and the winning entry in the school lunch category—which must meet the stringent cost requirements and nutrition guidelines that Chicago food service directors face—will be served to students throughout the school system.

"Our hope is that the students come up with creative and resourceful solutions to the problem of feeding kids healthy food within the constraints of a typical school budget," said Steve McDonnell, CEO of cooking contest sponsor Applegate Farms. "Kids are notorious for outwitting adults. We hope this is one of those times!"

In-class visits by chefs and nutrition experts will equip students to compete in a contest that prioritizes health as well as taste and presentation.

Although nutrition is becoming an increasingly common part of culinary education, most chef-preparation programs still focus in large part on "creating delicious food that's not necessarily

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very good for you,” said Jean Saunders, a trained chef and food scientist who now serves as HSC’s director of school wellness.

“Culinary education and the whole culinary world are definitely changing,” said Phil Mott of Kendall College, who is serving as co-chair of the event. “Particularly in terms of nutrition, sustainability, local sourcing—we’re part of a much larger picture now.”

This focus on healthy food at school is especially important in the context of the growing crisis of childhood obesity: Nationally, nearly a third of children are overweight or obese. These rates are dramatically higher in Latino and African-American communities. A recent community-level study from Sinai Health System shows that in Chicago’s Humboldt Park, for example, approximately 62 percent of children are overweight or obese. In West Town, approximately 73 percent of children are overweight or obese.

Michelle Hassan, manager for culinary arts of the CPS Education to Careers program, explained that the contest offers a unique opportunity for students to experience pride in their work while gaining professional experience relevant to these trends.

“We’re developing students to be the chefs of tomorrow,” said Hassan. “As our society becomes more health-conscious, these are very valuable skills for them to take into the job market.”

Guests at Cooking up Change will have the opportunity to taste the students’ award-winning creations as they mingle with friends, colleagues, prominent local chefs and celebrity judges, and cast a ballot for a special audience choice award.

“Seeing people enjoy the appetizers and desserts they’ve created will be great for the students, and seeing their meal served in all the schools—they’ll just be thrilled and so proud,” said Bernadette Bergren, who teaches culinary arts for CPS.

“It does a lot to develop their self-esteem,” she said. “These students are extremely talented, but they don’t really have confidence yet. People will be happy, people will enjoy the food, and seeing that enjoyment gives them a whole new perspective on what they can do. You should see the pride—it really makes a difference.”

To learn more about Cooking up Change – including tickets, profiles of celebrity judges, and updates from the teams of student chefs as they prepare for the contest – visit www.cookingupchange.org. To learn more about Healthy Schools Campaign, visit www.healthyschoolscampaign.org.

Applegate Farms (www.applegatefarms.com) produces more than 80 natural meat products and 28 certified organic products, from turkey to Genoa salami. Made from antibiotic-free beef, pork, chicken and turkey, our products contain no artificial ingredients, coloring agents or chemical preservatives.



Events and activities over the next six weeks offer opportunities to connect with the students, teachers, chefs, celebrity judges and school food advocates involved in Cooking up Change. If you would be interested in attending any of these events or arranging other opportunities to speak with the people involved, please contact Tara Kennon at (312) 419-1810 or tara@healthyschoolscampaign.org.

Meet the School Food Advocates

One of the important elements of this contest is its potential to catalyze real change for school food in Chicago and beyond. To bring together the culinary aspects of the contest with the public health and policy implications, we're working with a number of advocates and professionals dedicated to making school food better:

Bob Bloomer, regional vice president of Chartwells-Thompson, the organization that currently provides food service to CPS

Rochelle Davis, Healthy Schools Campaign's founding executive director

Guillermo Gomez, Healthy Schools Campaign's Chicago director, who works with parents and community advocates in Latino and African-American communities around the city to create change for school health

Michelle Hassan, manager of culinary education for CPS

Steve McDonnell, CEO of cooking contest sponsor Applegate Farms

Phil Mott, who now works in culinary education at Kendall College and previously ran the restaurant Le Francais

Jean Saunders, Healthy Schools Campaign's director of school wellness, who is also a trained chef and food scientist

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The Healthy Schools Campaign, an independent not-for-profit organization, is the leading authority on healthy school environments and a voice for people who care about our environment, our children, and education. Our mission is to advocate for policies and model programs that allow students and staff members to learn and work in a healthy school environment.