

# EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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## SNAP-Education youth cooking classes develop skills helpful beyond the kitchen

Something special happens when people gather around the table to eat together. It is even more amazing when they gather around the table to learn to cook together. Local University of Illinois Extension Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—Education staff partner with after school programs to offer youth cooking classes.

“Cooking provides children hands-on opportunities to learn math, reading, science, creative art, cultures/history, nutrition/health, while developing social and physical skills,” explained Skye Mibbs, SNAP-Ed instructor serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties.

By working together, participants learn to communicate, share responsibilities, and meet new people. Everyone comes from different backgrounds which can lead to conversations where people are sharing different views on the same topic. These types of social practices can help kids build new friendships, navigate different social environments, and learn to respect diversity.

Cooking classes are educational, developmental, and have many health benefits. They learn life skills, creativity, and healthy eating. Basic skills include measuring, following instructions, and using cooking equipment. Learning these skills increases confidence to perform tasks and make decisions by themselves. Participants are challenged to do the work with very little assistance. Skills used include organization, responsibility, and time and task management. “Seeing the kid’s reactions when they complete a recipe is so rewarding. They are all smiles and they start to notice that they can be independent,” says Skye. As the kids begin to master basic skills, they think of creative ways to improve the recipes or tailor them to what their family enjoys.

Classes help kids develop fine motor skills by using the small muscles in their hands. “This can lead to frustration as their movements can be awkward and hard to master. We encourage them to find what’s comfortable and to keep trying. Our classes teach patience and focus,” explained Skye. Dishes take time and have many steps that the kids have to complete properly and in order, but the persistence and patience pays off in the end. They become comfortable with long cooking processes and getting past this allows them to focus on the finer details such as appearance and shape.

By making the meals they are more likely to try new foods. They share this new knowledge with others and are proud of themselves. Cooking together strengthens family relationships, allows them to spend time together, share stories, and create memories. No matter what the future holds for these little chefs, whether it be a career in cooking or having a love for creating the occasional family meal, they have learned new skills that all help with life experiences. “I love that our classes provide skills and experiences that help them become successful adults,” Skye said.



Photo by Skye Mibbs | Illinois Extension

*SNAP-Education youth cooking classes are being offered through partnerships with local afterschool programs. Youth develop a wide range of skills including communication, creativity, math, reading, and nutrition.*

### Skye Mibbs

SNAP-Ed Instructor  
svmibbs@illinois.edu