



Presents...

Junior Chef Competitions

A Food Services Student Activity to Engage Kids with Cooking



Junior Chef Competitions: A Food Services Student Activity to Engage Kids with Cooking

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Figure 1: Junior Chefs hard at work in Boulder, Colo.

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Figure 2: Junior Chef concentrates during final plating at Casey Middle School, Boulder, Co.

Introduction

What is a Junior Chef Competition?

Hosting a junior chef competition in your school district is an innovative way to increase student participation in your school food program. The competition is appropriate for both elementary and secondary level contestants. You can also involve the local community to engage more stakeholders.

A little competition mixed with teamwork makes for a great learning environment. The junior chef competition model allows students to contribute to their school lunch menu while learning more about how the National School Lunch Program actually operates.

Within a district, competitions usually consist of five to six teams from schools. Elementary and secondary competitions are planned and hosted separately. On the day of the competition, the teams chosen to compete will come together to cook-off for a chance to have their recipe added to next year's lunch menu.

Each recipe is judged on the following criteria: USDA nutrition guideline requirements, cost per serving for the complete meal, appearance, taste, organization, hygiene and food safety of the team while preparing the meal, and if it can be replicated for large scale food service.



Figure 3: Chefs prepare their plates in Boulder, Colo.

Key Benefits

- Through engaging in the competition, students learn to appreciate just what it takes to get lunch on their tray each day.
- Students grow their understanding of USDA school meal requirements (the “complete meal”) and the basics of nutrition.
- Students gain valuable life skills by working as a team to create and cook.
- Students gain confidence by presenting and speaking about their recipes to the judging panel and audience.



Figure 4: A PTA volunteer monitors the competitors as they cook, Boulder, Colo.

Junior Chef Competition Planning Checklist

This is a step-by-step plan for hosting a Junior Chef Competition. The guide provides links to communication templates that can be customized for your own Junior Chef event.

Communication

1. Send [Junior Chef Announcement Letter](#) to elementary and/or secondary administration along with the following documents:
 - [Junior Chef Team Application](#)
 - Junior Chef Guidelines
 - [Elementary Guidelines](#)
 - [Secondary Guidelines](#)
 - [Junior Chef Recipe Entry Form](#)
 - [Junior Chef Nutrition Analysis Form](#) (only required for secondary level)
 - [Junior Chef Ingredient Budget List](#)

Note: You'll want to budget enough time to receive and review team applications. We suggest sending the Announcement Letter three months prior to the event date.

2. The application review should consider nutrition requirements, meal cost, and recipe creativity. Keep all recipe forms for each team so that they can be returned to contestants at the end of the cooking competition.
3. Make your team selections within a month of the event date so that contestants have time to prepare for the competition.
4. Invite students from the teams that were not invited to compete to serve as kid judges for the competition.

5. Select food services judges; can include the director, production chef, registered dietician, and other employees from the food service department.
6. Identify popular restaurants in the area and invite community chefs to judge.
7. Identify potential competition sponsors and send out a [Community Sponsor Letter](#). Community sponsorships and donations can come in many forms:
 - Cash sponsorships from existing vendors and local businesses
 - Competition T-shirts for team members
 - Product, promotional, and coupon donations for participant prize bags
8. Send out [Junior Chef Press Release](#) at least four weeks prior to the competition to invite the public and media to attend.



Figure 5: The competition heats up as this team sautés their stir-fry at Casey Middle School in Boulder, Colo.

Prior to the Junior Chef Competition

1. Choose a spacious location within the school district. A facility with a fully functioning kitchen is recommended.
2. Identify [Volunteers and Interns](#) to help with setup, logistics, and photography.
3. Plan for a two-and-a-half hour event. Contestants will have 90 minutes to prepare, cook, and plate their meal.
4. Secure audio setup for MC presenter
5. Print a large blank check for the winning team and certificates for all participants.
6. Print copies of [Junior Chef Judges Sheets](#) and completed recipe entry forms. Bring clipboards and pens for your judges.

Setting up Cooking Stations

Teams are encouraged to bring any equipment they might need, but you should also set up a basic cooking station for them. This list includes important station must-haves:

1. 5 to 6 tables (8' recommended, one extra for judging table)
2. 5 to 6 portable burners with 2 butane cans each
3. Sauté pans for each team (12" recommended)
4. A chef's knife, spatula, whisk, serving spoon, dish towel, and cutting board for each team
5. 4 clean plates and 1 cup for each table (two plates for judging, two for public tasting, cup for milk requirement)
6. Sign with team names on each station
7. Tasting spoons at each station

8. Gloves and sanitizer bucket



Figure 6: The judges deliberate at Casey Middle School, Boulder, Colo.

Day of the Junior Chef Competition

1. Setup individual cooking stations.
2. Setup the judging table with napkins, tasting forks, knives, and a bin for dirty silverware.
3. Meet with judges to go over judging criteria and encourage them to write notes throughout the competition.
4. Welcome everyone and go over the following information:
 - Explain competition guidelines, timing of cooking, and presenting.
 - Introduce teams, food service judges, guest chefs, and kid judges
5. Start the competition.

6. Throughout the cooking time have the MC talk to each team and ask how they chose their recipe, how they prepared for the competition, etc. Also ask kid judges what they look for in a school lunch or what recipe they're most excited to try. Find out more about chef judges and why they came out to judge the competition.
7. End cooking time and begin the plate presentations. Tier presentation times if desired. Have each team describe their recipe (two plates should be brought up) before the judges taste the dish. Clear plates to make space for the next team.
8. Judges deliberate. (This is where their notes will come in handy.)
9. During deliberation encourage the teams to try each other's recipes.
10. Announce the judges' decisions:
 - Give certificates and participant prize bags to the runners-up.
 - Announce third and second respectively.
 - Present the large check to the winning team.
11. Give judging sheets and initial application forms to each team. These judging packets serve as helpful learning tools for future competitions.



Figure 7: The winning team at Casey Middle School in Boulder, Colo. with their prize.

Event Follow-Up

1. Send a follow-up email or letter for administration to distribute to school parents. Include pictures and any fun kid quotes or comments from the day. This will inform parents who were unable to attend or didn't hear about the event, possibly motivating them to participate in the future.
2. Thank-you letters are always a good way to get your volunteers coming back for more. Be sure to send your volunteers a quick thank-you to let them know you appreciate their help.

Conclusion

Junior Chef Competitions are a great way to introduce your students to scratch cooking, to encourage healthy diets by familiarizing them with the nutritional requirements of school lunch, and in general allow children to become more comfortable making healthy decisions for themselves. Hosting a Junior Chef Competition at your school means: students learning about the work that goes into creating a healthy school lunch, an increase in school lunch participation, bringing together multiple school groups (faculty, parents, students) to rally around the good work Food Services is doing, and most importantly happy, healthy kids!

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JUNIOR CHEF ANNOUNCEMENT LETTER

[Insert school district logo]

[Today's date]

Dear [principal name],

We are hosting a Junior Chef Cooking Competition and would love for your students to participate. The concept for the competition is to plan a menu item that is kid-friendly, follows the USDA meal guidelines, and meets the district's per-meal food cost criteria. The winning recipe will be featured on the [next academic year] menu and the school with the winning team will be awarded [insert \$ amount] in prize money.

The competition will be held at [location] on [date]. We encourage teachers and/or parents to form and mentor teams. The following documents are attached:

- Junior Chef Team Application
- Junior Chef Guidelines – [Elementary – or – Secondary]
- Junior Chef Recipe Entry Form
- [Junior Chef Nutrition Analysis Form] (Only required for Secondary)
- Junior Chef Ingredient Budget List

Please forward these on to anyone at your school who might be interested in this event. All applications should be submitted by [deadline date].

Thank you for your support of our school lunch program!

Sincerely,

[School district name] Food Service Team



JUNIOR CHEF COMMUNITY SPONSOR LETTER

[Insert school district logo]

[Today's date]

Dear [name of business owner],

We're hosting our first Junior Chef Cooking Competition and would love for your business to be involved as a [sponsor or donor depending on ask]. The concept for the competition is to plan a menu item that is kid-friendly, follows the USDA meal guidelines, and meets the district's per-meal food cost criteria. The winning recipe will be featured on the [next academic year] menu.

The competition will be held at [location] on [date]. Please let us know if you would like to be involved by providing a [check donation for competition costs, gift card, product, coupon, or promotional item].

Thank you for your support of our school lunch program!

Sincerely,

[School district name] Food Service Team



JUNIOR CHEF TEAM APPLICATION

Please complete this form and return it along with your recipe entry form to [\[email\]](#). Forms and recipes must be received by [\[date\]](#).

Team Contact Info

Team Name: _____
Host School: _____
Adult Contact: _____
Relationship to Team: _____
Phone Number: _____
Email: _____

Team Members

Provide the names of 2-4 students who are enrolled in the [\[school district\]](#), any combination of [\[grade level criteria\]](#).

Team Member #1: _____ Grade: _____
Team Member #2: _____ Grade: _____
Team Member #3: _____ Grade: _____
Team Member #4: _____ Grade: _____

JUNIOR CHEF GUIDELINES – ELEMENTARY

Teams

Teams should consist of 2-4 students and have at least one adult coach to help with filling out the application forms, cooking practice, as well as to chaperone the team at the competition. The coach can be a school food service team member, a teacher, other school employee, or a parent/guardian. Here is the process for applying and team selection:

- Teams must submit the following documents by [submission date]:
 - Junior Chef Team Application
 - Junior Chef Recipe Entry Form
 - Junior Chef Ingredient Budget List
- Of these applicants, [# of teams] teams will be picked to move on to the actual cooking competition at [location] on [competition date].

Recipes

Adults are encouraged to work with their student team members on recipe development. You are planning a meal that must be kid-friendly and will be given [amount] to purchase your ingredients. Teams are encouraged to use original, family recipes. Recipes must meet the following requirements:

- Meet plated meal cost of **\$1.25 per serving**
- Include the five meal components required in the USDA National School Lunch Program: meat/meat alternate, grain, fruit, vegetable, and milk.
- Meet the USDA Meal Regulations Guidelines for the five food items that are required for a daily lunch:
 - **Meat or meat alternates**—one serving of the following:
 - Meats: 2 oz.
 - Cheese: 2 oz.
 - Tofu: 2 oz. protein equivalent (for tofu to meet 1 oz. of protein equivalent, a 2.2 oz. serving must contain a minimum of 5 grams of protein)
 - Egg: one large, whole equals 2 oz. protein equivalent
 - Beans: 1/2 cup, cooked equals 2 oz. protein equivalent
 - Yogurt: 8 oz. or 1 cup equals 2 oz. protein equivalent
 - **Grains/breads:**
 - 51% whole grain is required
 - A minimum of one grain equivalent (two grain equivalents is allowable depending on the dish, i.e. pasta, sandwich, fried rice)



- For a grain serving to meet the 1 oz. equivalent it must be at least 28 grams and 16 of those must be whole grains
- Grains include sliced bread, rolls, buns, tortillas, pita, or biscuits; or 1/2 cup cooked rice, pasta, noodles, or other grains
- **Vegetable:** A minimum $\frac{3}{4}$ cup
- **Fruit:** A minimum $\frac{1}{2}$ cup
- **Milk:** One cup of fat free or 1% milk
- Include at least one locally sourced ingredient and two ingredients that can be sourced through the [USDA Foods Program](#)
- May not include peanuts, tree nuts, fish, or desserts

Judging

The cooking competition will be evaluated and judged based on the following criteria:

Application Review

- **USDA Meal Requirements:** Meal must contain the required five meal components: meat/meat alternate, grain, vegetable, fruit, and milk.
- **Meal Cost:** A serving of the complete meal must not exceed \$1.25.

Competition Day

- **Appearance:** Is the meal plated well? Does it have a variety of colors? Does it look appetizing?
- **Taste:** Is the dish pleasing to the taste buds? Is it seasoned properly? Do the ingredients complement one another? Was any component over or under cooked?
- **Food Safety:** Teams must follow basic food safety procedures, work cleanly, and dress clean and professionally. This includes pulling hair back, wearing gloves, and using sanitizer provided. Food must be properly handled and proper temperatures must be followed.
- **Replicable:** Can this dish be replicated in our district? Do we have the time and labor to replicate this for large batch cooking? For example, if your recipe requires the cook to individually prep each serving unit (like stuffing a pasta shell or dumpling) that may not be a practical recipe for expanding the recipe from 12 servings to 13,000 servings.



Day of the Event

- Teams should plan to arrive at [time] on [competition date]. The event is expected to last two and half hours.
- Teams will have 90 minutes to prepare, cook, and plate their meal. They will be required to present it to the judges and explain the components represented. Adults are allowed to cook with elementary students during the competition.
- Each team will have a cooking station setup with a portable burner, sauté pan, chef's knife, spatula, whisk, tongs, tasting spoons, serving spoon, cutting boards, ½ sheet pans, dish towel, sanitation gloves, sanitation bucket, side towels, paper towels, and all purpose cleaner. Teams will have access to kitchen ovens under the supervision of food service staff.

Resources

- **Meal Costs:** Visit [USDA's Food Buying Guide Calculator for Child Nutrition Programs](#) for help with purchasing and quantities.
- **Local Ingredients:** About.com's [State-Specific Seasonal Produce Guides](#) can help you determine seasonal produce in your state. Cooking a recipe out of season for the competition is permitted, but make sure that one of the items in your recipe can be sourced locally at some time throughout the year.
- **Commodity Ingredients:** See the current [list of commodity foods](#) that are available to schools by the USDA.

Please submit all application materials or questions to [name] at [email].

JUNIOR CHEF GUIDELINES – SECONDARY

Teams

Teams should consist of 2-4 students and have at least one adult coach to help with filling out the application forms, cooking practice, as well as to chaperone the team at the competition. The coach can be a school food service team member, a teacher, other school employee, or a parent/guardian. Here is the process for applying and team selection:

- Teams must submit the following documents by [submission date]:
 - Junior Chef Team Application
 - Junior Chef Recipe Entry Form
 - Junior Chef Nutrition Analysis Form
 - Junior Chef Ingredient Budget List
- Of these applicants, [# of teams] teams will be picked to move on to the actual cooking competition at [location] on [competition date].

Recipes

Adults are encouraged to work with their student team members on recipe development. You are planning a meal that must be kid-friendly and will be given [amount] to purchase your ingredients. Teams are encouraged to use original, family recipes. Recipes must meet the following requirements:

- Meet plated meal cost of **\$1.25 per serving**
- Include the five meal components required in the USDA National School Lunch Program: meat/meat alternate, grain, fruit, vegetable, and milk.
- Meet the USDA Meal Nutrient Standards:
 - Sodium: <1420 milligrams
 - Calories: 600-850 calories
 - Saturated fats: <10% of total calories
 - Trans fat: 0 grams per serving
- Meet the USDA Meal Regulations Guidelines for the five food items that are required for a daily lunch:
 - **Meat or meat alternates**—one serving of the following:
 - Meats: 2 oz.
 - Cheese: 2 oz.
 - Tofu: 2 oz. protein equivalent (for tofu to meet 1 oz. of protein equivalent, a 2.2 oz. serving must contain a minimum of 5 grams of protein)
 - Egg: one large, whole equals 2 oz. protein equivalent
 - Beans: 1/2 cup, cooked equals 2 oz. protein equivalent

- Yogurt: 8 oz. or 1 cup equals 2 oz. protein equivalent
 - **Grains/breads:**
 - 51% whole grain is required
 - A minimum of one grain equivalent (two grain equivalents is allowable depending on the dish, i.e. pasta, sandwich, fried rice)
 - For a grain serving to meet the 1 oz. equivalent it must be at least 28 grams and 16 of those must be whole grains
 - Grains include sliced bread, rolls, buns, tortillas, pita, or biscuits; or 1/2 cup cooked rice, pasta, noodles, or other grains
 - **Vegetable:** One cup
 - **Fruit:** One cup
 - **Milk:** One cup of fat free or 1% milk
- Include at least one locally sourced ingredient and two ingredients that can be sourced through the [USDA Foods Program](#)
- May not include peanuts, tree nuts, fish, or desserts

Judging

The cooking competition will be evaluated and judged based on the following criteria:

Application Review

- **USDA Meal Requirements:** Meal must contain the required five meal components: meat/meat alternate, grain, vegetable, fruit, and milk.
- **Nutrient Analysis:** Meal must meet USDA Meal Nutrient Standards.
- **Meal Cost:** A serving of the complete meal must not exceed \$1.25.

Competition Day

- **Appearance:** Is the meal plated well? Does it have a variety of colors? Does it look appetizing?
- **Taste:** Is the dish pleasing to the taste buds? Is it seasoned properly? Do the ingredients complement one another? Was any component over or under cooked?
- **Food Safety:** Teams must follow basic food safety procedures, work cleanly, and dress clean and professionally. This includes pulling hair back, wearing gloves, and using sanitizer provided. Food must be properly handled and proper temperatures must be followed.
- **Replicable:** Can this dish be replicated in our district? Do we have the time and labor to replicate this for large batch cooking? For example, if your recipe requires the cook to individually prep each serving unit (like stuffing a pasta shell or dumpling) that may not be a practical recipe for expanding the recipe from 12 servings to 13,000 servings.



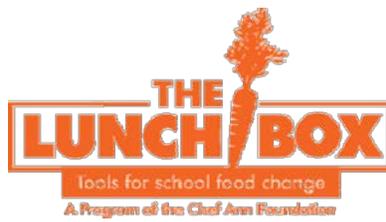
Day of the Event

- Teams should plan to arrive at [time] on [competition date]. The event is expected to last two and half hours.
- Teams will have 90 minutes to prepare, cook, and plate their meal. They will be required to present it to the judges and explain the components represented. Adults are not allowed to cook with the secondary contestants during the cooking competition, but can provide guidance in cooking and food safety.
- Each team will have a cooking station setup with a portable burner, sauté pan, chef's knife, spatula, whisk, tongs, tasting spoons, serving spoon, cutting boards, ½ sheet pans, dish towel, sanitation gloves, sanitation bucket, side towels, paper towels, and all purpose cleaner. Teams will have access to kitchen ovens under the supervision of food service staff.

Resources

- **Nutrient Requirements:** Gain a better understanding of nutrient standards by reviewing this presentation on the [USDA Meal Pattern Requirements](#).
- **Nutrition Analysis:** Use a reputable nutrition data website such as [Calorie Count](#) or [Nutrition Data](#) to find out the following nutrition facts for your recipes.
- **Meal Costs:** Visit [USDA's Food Buying Guide Calculator for Child Nutrition Programs](#) for help with purchasing and quantities.
- **Local Ingredients:** About.com's [State-Specific Seasonal Produce Guides](#) can help you determine seasonal produce in your state. Cooking a recipe out of season for the competition is permitted, but make sure that one of the items in your recipe can be sourced locally at some time throughout the year.
- **Commodity Ingredients:** See the current [list of commodity foods](#) that are available to schools by the USDA.

Please submit all application materials or questions to [name] at [email].



JUNIOR CHEF RECIPE ENTRY FORM

Please complete this entire recipe form, including individual recipe information, milk requirement cost, meal totals, and cooking instructions and submit along with your team application.

Team Name: _____

Meal Name: _____

Number of Meal Servings: (must be at least 12) _____

Recipe #1

Name: _____

Serving Size: _____

Meal Components Satisfied: (circle all that apply) Meat Vegetable Grain Fruit Milk

Ingredient	Local Food?	USDA Food?	Quantity	Unit/ Measure	Total Cost	Cost per Serving	Meal Component Contribution

Recipe #2



Name: _____

Serving Size: _____

Meal Components Satisfied: (circle all that apply) Meat Vegetable Grain Fruit Milk

Ingredient	Local Food?	USDA Food?	Quantity	Unit/ Measure	Total Cost	Cost per Serving	Meal Component Contribution

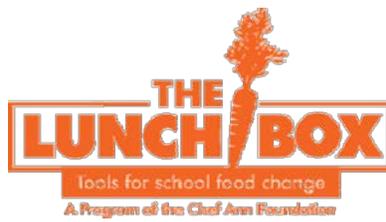
Recipe #3

Name: _____

Serving Size: _____

Meal Components Satisfied: (circle all that apply) Meat Vegetable Grain Fruit Milk

Ingredient	Local Food?	USDA Food?	Quantity	Unit/ Measure	Total Cost	Cost per Serving	Meal Component Contribution



Recipe #4

Name: _____

Serving Size: _____

Meal Components Satisfied: (circle all that apply) Meat Vegetable Grain Fruit Milk

Ingredient	Local Food?	USDA Food?	Quantity	Unit/ Measure	Total Cost	Cost per Serving	Meal Component Contribution

Milk Requirement

Serving Size: **1 cup**

Meal Components Satisfied (circle all that apply): Meat Vegetable Grain Fruit **Milk**

Ingredient	Local Food?	USDA Food?	Quantity	Unit/ Measure	Total Cost	Cost per Serving	Meal Component Contribution
Fat free milk	Yes	No	12	Cup	[enter cost]	[enter cost]	1 Cup

Meal Total

Ingredient	Total Cost of Ingredients	Total Cost per Meal
Recipe #1		
Recipe #2		
Recipe #3		
Recipe #4		
Milk Requirement		
MEAL TOTAL:		

Instructions



JUNIOR CHEF NUTRITION ANALYSIS FORM

Use a reputable nutrition data website such as [Calorie Count](#) or [Nutrition Data](#) to find out the following nutrition facts for your recipes. Be sure to separate out the information for each recipe that is being prepared for your complete meal.

Recipe #1: _____

	Amount in Recipe	Judging Notes
Sodium		
Calories		
Saturated fat		
Trans Fats		

Recipe #2: _____

	Amount in Recipe	Judging Notes
Sodium		
Calories		
Saturated fat		
Trans Fats		

Recipe #3: _____

	Amount in Recipe	Judging Notes
Sodium		
Calories		
Saturated fat		
Trans Fats		

Recipe #4: _____

	Amount in Recipe	Judging Notes
Sodium		
Calories		
Saturated fat		
Trans Fats		



[Today's date]

For immediate release

Contact: [Person's name]

[Person's info]

[Insert school district logo]

Junior Chef Competition – [date] at [location]

[School district name] student chefs compete for money and fame

Join us this [date] for our **first** annual Junior Chef competition!

[School district name] students from throughout the district will compete in an Iron Chef style competition to win money for their schools and a place on the [next academic year] school food menu.

Teams must create a dish that is not only delicious but also meets the USDA guidelines, is healthy, and stays at or under the [\$1.25/plate price allocation]. We expect some great food will be presented to our judges.

Local food celebrities will join [school district name] food services staff to help judge the competition. Among the guest judges will be [list community chef and guest judges]. Sponsors of this year's event include [names of sponsoring vendors or local businesses].

[Title of your competition]

[Time] [Date]

[Location]

[Address]

Media are welcome to attend

The schools represented in the cook-off this year include: [list of schools and team names].

We hope to see you there!

[School district name] Food Service Team



JUNIOR CHEF GUEST JUDGING CRITERIA

Team: _____

Categories	Score 1-10	Comments
Presentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plating, Appearance of food, Color, Clean 		
Taste <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flavorful, Properly Seasoned 		

Total Score:	Out of 20	
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FOOD SERVICE TEAM JUDGING CRITERIA

Team: _____

Categories	Score 1-10	Comments
Sanitation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionally dressed contestants, clean as you go, follows food safety guidelines 		
Followed Recipe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must follow the recipe that was originally approved for submission 		
Meets Cost Expectations		
Meets USDA Meal Component Guidelines (note any missing or insufficient requirements)		

Total Score:	Out of 40	
---------------------	------------------	--