

# EAST OREGONIAN

## Nutrition specialists mixing it up with school lunches

School and daycare nutrition specialists learned new recipes at a regional, state-sponsored training Friday in Umatilla.

**Jade McDowell** • East Oregonian

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Staff photo by Jade McDowell. Attendees at a regional school and childcare nutrition training sample different recipes for lunch at Umatilla High School.

While pizza, sloppy Joes and chicken nuggets still make an appearance in school cafeterias sometimes, today's school lunches are not what they used to be.

"I like to encourage parents to go have lunch with their students at school at least one time to see how things have changed," chef Garrett Berdan said. "They might be surprised to see the variety, the different colors, the love and care that goes into them."

Berdan was at Umatilla High School on Friday, teaching child nutrition program professionals from schools and daycares around Eastern Oregon for a training sponsored by the Oregon Dairy and Nutrition Council and the Oregon Department of Education's Child Nutrition Services. The annual trainings cover a variety of topics, such as evidence-based lunchroom design that helps encourage kids to make healthier eating choices. Friday morning's training included a section on knife skills with fruits and vegetables and fresh herbs.

By 1 p.m. attendees had cooked 16 different recipes and everyone sat down to try the buffet of options. They loaded up plates with arroz con pollo, spicy Asian noodles with tofu, fiesta chicken chili, Brazilian rice and beans, berry smoothies, oatmeal, roasted garbanzo beans and more.

Most of the recipes, Berdan said, were adapted from the Food Hero program that Oregon State University's extension service uses to teach families about affordable, nutritious cooking (anyone can look up recipes at [www.foodhero.org](http://www.foodhero.org)).

"It's nice to have those recipes featured at school, because there's a good chance they have already tasted them at home, especially if their families are SNAP recipients," he said.

U.S. Department of Agriculture standards for school and childcare nutrition have gotten more strict in the past 20 years, Berdan said, which presents more of a challenge but also means that in many cases students today are eating healthier meals at school than their parents did.

Menus will vary depending on who runs the kitchen, but for the most part culinary specialists are encouraged to offer a more diverse selection that represents a variety of cultures.

Rikkilynn Larson, child nutrition director for Umatilla School District, said Friday was the second time Umatilla had played host to one of the state's continuing education trainings. Last time she picked up a few new recipes she incorporated into Umatilla school lunches, including a gourmet grilled cheese sandwich with roasted tomatoes. This time she found a few more she wanted to try.

"It's so amazing," she said. "I always learn something new."

As attendees tasted the various recipes, accompanied by Armand Larive Middle School students who were documenting the event for ALTV, they discussed ways to adapt them for their own students. Several people thought the fiesta chicken chili turned out too spicy for younger students, for example, and one table decided they would add pineapple juice to the berry smoothie to sweeten it without adding sugar. Some attendees discussed which recipes could be used for students who are gluten-free, dairy-free or have other dietary restrictions — something that has become increasingly common.

Larson said it can be hard to walk the line between offering healthy, diverse foods and offering selections that most students will eat on any given day. Umatilla School District has been doing tastings with children at OSU extension service programs and that has helped, she said.

Berdan said he hoped participants in the day's training came away with new ideas for next year's lunch and breakfast menus.

"We're really focused on building culinary skills and culinary confidence," he said.

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