Illinois Junior Chefs

Overview

Illinois Junior Chefs (IJC) is a direct education curriculum designed to improve dietary attitudes and behaviors in youth ages 8-13 through learning hands-on cooking skills and MyPlate food group education. IJC is a 10-hour cooking education program designed for five two-hour classes. Each class focuses on a food group and related cooking skills. Recipes provided let participants practice specific cooking skills for preparation of foods for the food group highlighted in each lesson. A variety of recipes are included in the curriculum as well as additional resource links for supplemental recipes. Recipe selection should be based on age-appropriate cooking tasks for the participants and culturally appropriate recipes for diverse audiences. Participants are recruited through eligible schools and community agencies. Eligible participants attend IJC classes at sites having access to running water and electricity for the purpose of hand washing, food safety, and preparing recipes that need cooking. **Target Behavior:** Healthy Eating, Other: Cooking Skills **Intervention Type:** Direct Education

Intervention Reach and Adoption

IJC targets youth aged 8-13 years at in-school, after-school, and summer programming sites. The intervention is completed after 10 hours of direct education. A school or agency could teach this curriculum if teachers/staff are trained on food safety, cooking skills and basic nutrition education. Educators work with eligible schools and other community agencies to recruit youth at summer camps, libraries, churches, community centers, etc. **Setting:** Community (Live), School (Learn) **Target Audience:** Elementary School, Middle School **Race/Ethnicity:** All

Intervention Components

IJC includes 10 hours of direct education cooking lessons with recipes and handouts. These intervention components provide students the knowledge and skills necessary to improve cooking behaviors which are
associated with healthier dietary intake over time. Recipes may be changed to meet cultural preferences or seasonal availability of fruits and vegetables as long as the recipe coincides with the cooking skill and food group highlighted in the lesson. It is recommended to have a teacher to student ratio of approximately 1 to 8 to ensure teachers have time to assist all students to learn cooking skills. Funds or sources of donated foods would be necessary to obtain the foods used for the recipes prepared in class. Evaluation surveys are provided, but data analysis is not included.

**Intervention Materials**

IJC provides an evidence-based curriculum that includes the following materials:
- Teacher manual (lesson plans, student handouts, optional recipes)
- Evaluation tools
- Cookbook

**Intervention Costs**

Materials available at no cost.

**Evidence Summary**

IJC has been evaluated over multiple years using pre- and post-program surveys and pre- and post-program observational assessments of hands-on cooking skills. Analyses of survey data indicated that participants experienced significant improvements in cooking self-efficacy, cooking attitudes, fruit and vegetable preferences, and cooking behaviors (all \( p < .001 \)) after participating in IJC. Although change in eating behavior is not a targeted outcome of the program, eating behaviors did improve from pre- to post-intervention (though not significantly, \( p = .073 \)). Observational assessments of hands-on cooking skills with a subset of participants showed significant improvements from pre- to post-intervention in participants’ abilities to use a peeler, use a grater, beat and fold ingredients, measure ingredients, and crack eggs (all \( p < .05 \)). Additional information on the evidence supporting IJC can be found at:
- [SNAP-Ed Connection Success Stories](https://https://snapedtoolkit.org/interventions/programs/illinois-junior-chefs/)

**Evidence-based Approach:** Research-tested

**Evaluation Indicators**

Based on the SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework, the following outcome indicators can be used to evaluate
intervention progress and success.

<table>
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<th>Individual</th>
<th>Readiness and Capacity – Short Term (ST)</th>
<th>Changes – Medium Term (MT)</th>
<th>Effectiveness and Maintenance – Long Term (LT)</th>
<th>Population Results (R)</th>
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<td>Environmental Settings</td>
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<td>Sectors of Influence</td>
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- ST1: Cooking self-efficacy (confidence to execute skills)
- ST1: Cooking attitudes (enthusiasm for and motivation to cook)
- ST1: Fruit and vegetables preferences (liking for and motivation to eat healthy foods)
- ST1: Cooking behaviors (motivation to eat a healthy diet and intake of healthy foods over time)

**Evaluation Materials**

A pre- and post-survey is available for this program. This survey was refined over several years and asks about cooking self-efficacy, cooking attitudes, and cooking and eating behaviors. The survey was pilot tested with youth who also completed cognitive interviews to confirm they understood the survey questions. It is designed for children aged 8-13, takes an average of 10 minutes to complete, and should be used before the first lesson and at the end of the last lesson.

**Additional Information**

**Website:** The [IJC link](https://snapedtoolkit.org/interventions/programs/illinois-junior-chefs/) includes the teacher manual, recipe book, and evaluation tools. **Contact Person:** Brenda Derrick University of Illinois Extension Senior Manager, Curriculum & Research, FCS 217-300-9077 Email: derrickb@illinois.edu