

Cafeteria Chronicles: Garland Independent School District

Responding to students' meal preferences can be daunting.

But the team at **Garland Independent School District** in Garland, TX were eager to hear students' feedback and equip their staff with the skills to prepare new recipe concepts successfully.

When developing new menu ideas, the team at Garland ISD relies on the culinary skills of Chef Kevin Jenkins as well as feedback from their Menu Advisory Council (MAC). Garland's MAC includes students, parents, teachers and school nutrition staff and meets four times a year to hear menu feedback and provide education to the school community about nutritional standards followed. By educating the school community about nutrition standards, the team at Garland has been able to create understanding and build a stronger relationship with the school community. These efforts led to the district earning the Innovation in Nutrition Education Healthy Meals Incentives (HMI) Recognition Award.

"We are able to turn like adversaries into advocates, is what I like to say, because when they really see and understand or be able to ask those questions and you can really talk about what really happens with them, then they become your biggest champions."

-Jennifer Miller, Director of Student Nutrition Services

To equip their staff with the skills to create recipes dreamed up by the MAC, the district invested in culinary training. Chef Kevin Jenkins helped create several training videos from basic culinary skills to batch cooking and HACCP-based food safety practices. Thanks to the effective video training, the staff can easily prepare their "ground beef base" recipe which uses herbs, fresh onions and bell peppers for flavor instead of simply sodium. This base is used in several of the district's new recipes, such as Chili, Homemade Taco Meat and Bolognese Sauce. Building on their success, additional scratch-made recipes for Breakfast Frittatas and Overnight Oats were also developed, and the district earned the Innovation in the Preparation of School Meals HMI Recognition Award.

Hear more about Garland ISD's commitment to culinary training [here](#).

Not only do the new recipes taste great, but the nutrition has also improved. By switching to the "ground beef base" in several recipes instead of precooked beef, the

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district reduced sodium by over 200 mg in their Homemade Taco Meat recipe and reduced sodium by over 75 mg in their Bolognese Sauce recipe. These changes led to the district earning the Lunch Trailblazer HMI Recognition Award.

Kudos to the team at Garland ISD for leading the way in school nutrition!