

Culinary Skills for School Meals | August 2023

Analysis of Participant Evaluations: Pre and 3-months Post



Background

Purpose

The first ever Culinary Skills for School Meals Training took place August 14-18, 2023. A total of 26 school nutrition staff participated in the training. The goal of the training was to help participants gain confidence in their meal cooking skills and to implement techniques learned at the training in their school nutrition programs. To assess improvement and changes in skills or behaviors over time due to the training session, Let's Go! conducted two separate surveys—before (Pre) and after (Post) the event.

Surveys

The Culinary Skills for School Meals training Pre- and Post-Surveys were developed and disseminated using RedCap. The Pre-Survey contained 12 questions related to culinary skills to assess use and implementation at work. The Post-Survey contained 17 total questions; 12 were the same skills-based questions as in the Pre-Survey, with three additional Likert-scale opinion questions and two qualitative questions were also asked. The Pre-Survey was completed the week before the training or prior to the start of the first training session. The Post-Survey was disseminated 3 months after the training on 11/8/23. The majority were completed by 11/21/23. The last survey was completed on 12/5/23.

Pre-Training

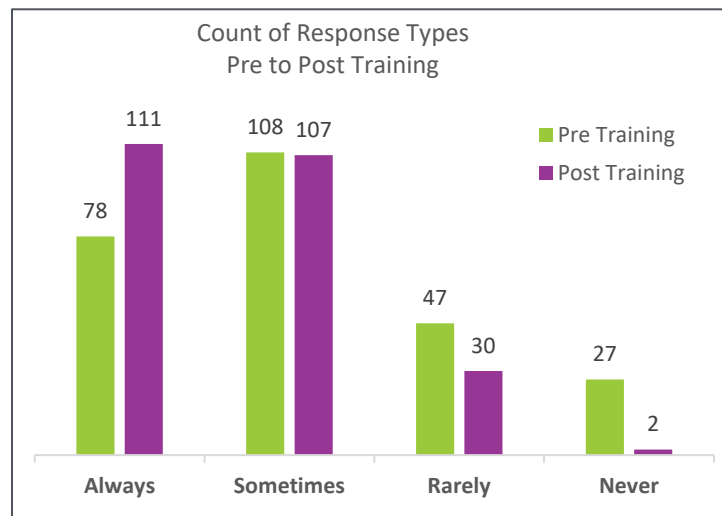
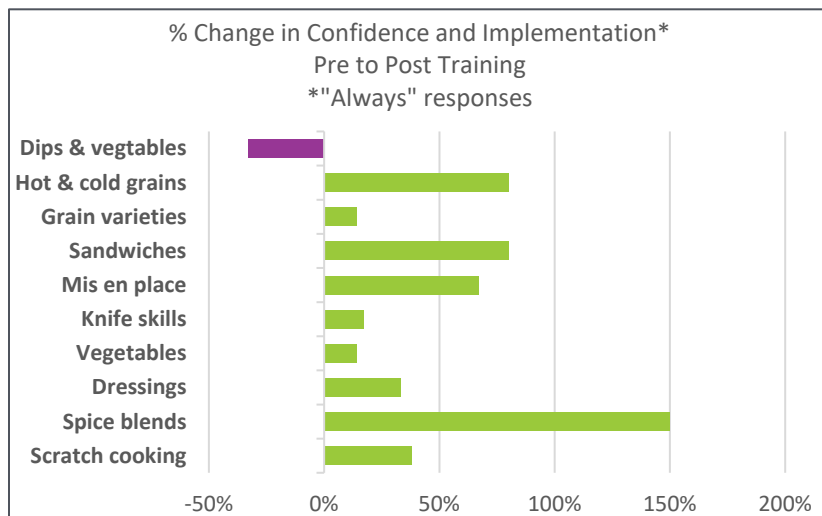
Prior to the training, participants were asked how often they use a variety of culinary techniques at work. All 26 training participants completed the survey.

- About half of the participants came to the training feeling the most confident about vegetable preparation. 54% (14 people) reported they always felt confident in using a variety of methods to prepare vegetables.
- Before the training, participants were already proficient in scratch cooking. Only 1% (3 people) said they were rarely or never confident in their scratch cooking abilities.
- The least used skill was *mis en place*. 35% (9 people) said they always used *mis en place* techniques, while 38% (10 people) never or rarely did.
- Across all techniques, 30% of responses were always confident, 42% were sometimes, 18% rarely, and 10% never.

Post-Training

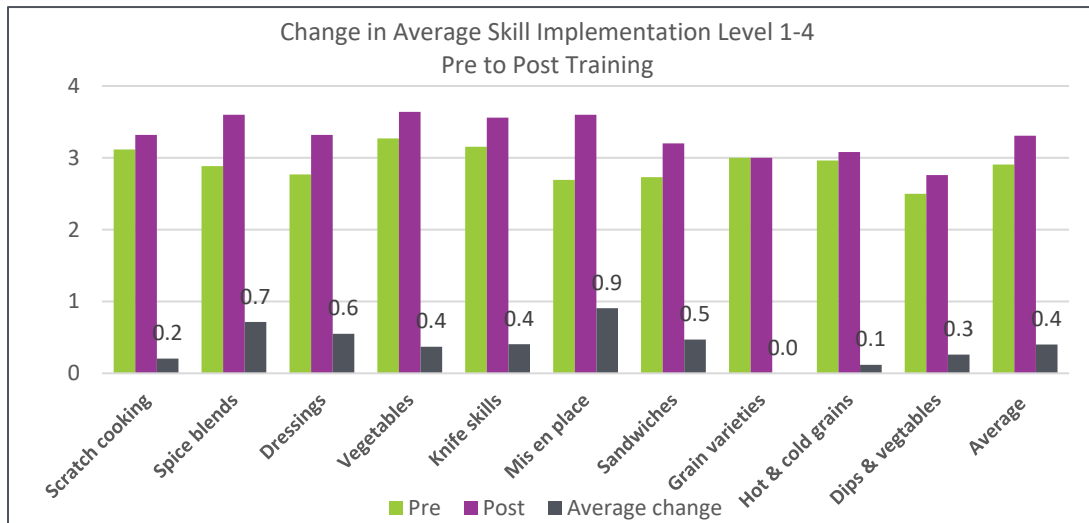
Following the training, participants were asked again about the same culinary skills, as well as their opinions on the training itself. A total of 25 out of 26 participants completed the follow-up survey.

- 100% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the training increased their culinary knowledge or skills in the school setting.
- 100% of participants agreed or strongly agreed they would recommend this training to other school nutrition professionals.
- 92% (23 people) either agreed or strongly agreed that the skills they learned in the training have improved the meals their school serves.



Outcomes

Overall, there was a 46% increase in “Always” responses which corresponds to confidence and implementation of techniques. Before the training, only 23% of participants (6 people) always felt confidence in their low-sodium spice blends. After the training, that number jumped to 60% of participants (15 people). The percentage of “Never” responses fell from 10% of all responses to just 1% after the training. Across the group, average use of grain varieties saw no change following the training, while overall use of ‘mis en place’ went up nearly 25% (0.9 points). Before the training, 62% of participants (16 people) reported always or sometimes using ‘mis en place’ compared to 100% (25 people) after the training. The overall change of average implementation across all skills was 0.4 on a 4-point scale, or 10%. The culinary training was effective at improving participant cooking skills and boosting confidence levels. What began as the least applied skill—*mis en place*—ended up as the skill that saw the largest increase in implementation.



Post-Training Feedback

In addition, participants were asked to share more on their experience and changes since the culinary training event. Participants commented on their greatest take-away and described actions or changes they made at work since participating in the training.

Greatest take-away...

Take-away comments were mostly about fruit and vegetable preparation, knife skills, making spice blends, and cooking healthier and better tasting meals from scratch. Others mentioned learning a variety of new techniques, the great atmosphere, and gaining self-confidence.

“How to prepare frozen vegetables, knife skills, and cooking grains were huge take aways for me with this training.”

“It is easier than it seems to use scratch cooking in school meals. Trying new things can have great success with the kids we serve.”

“My biggest take away was how simple it is to diversify & amplify our school meals.”

“Tons of great details and techniques, but the biggest benefit for me was a boost to my self-confidence as a cook.”

Actions since...

Most actions or changes participants took since the training were related to making spices, dressings, or preparing food from scratch. Participants made good use of new recipes from the training book and enjoy cooking or roasting vegetables in new ways. They also shared that they have applied their new knife skills and have expanded sandwich options.

“Trying the recipes in the book...making all dressings from scratch.”

“We have introduced new ways of preparing veggies & really stepped up our sandwich making game. The kids absolutely love it!”

“Thinking more outside the box. When we have the time. I highly recommend taking this course. I hope they do something again next year that I'm invited too.”