

# Let's Go! Culinary Skills for Schools Training 2025

## Evaluation: Participant Pre and Post Survey

February 2026

## Purpose

### Background

In 2025, the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Let's Go! Culinary Skills for School Meals Training trained 99 school nutrition staff, representing 32 Maine School Nutrition Programs. Since 2023, a total of 196 school nutrition staff representing 45 districts have been trained. The four training sessions were held on:

- August 4-8, 2025 | Mt. Blue High School, Farmington
- August 11-15, 2025 | Edward Little High School, Auburn
- August 18-22, 2025 | Kennebunk High School, Kennebunk
- September 29-October 3, 2025 | Presque Isle High School, Presque Isle

The goal of the training was to help school nutrition staff 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, two separate surveys were conducted—before (Pre) and after (Post) the training.

The training objectives we aimed to measure were to:

- Improve the culinary skill level of school nutrition professionals
- Increase the quality and appeal of meals served to students
- Increase the consumption of vegetables, fruits, dairy, whole grains, plant proteins or lean meats within the context of balanced menu planning for school-aged children

### Survey

The Culinary Skills for School Meals Pre and Post Surveys were developed and disseminated using RedCap. The Pre Survey and Post Survey included 10 questions that assessed participants' confidence level in five specific culinary skills (scratch cooking, kitchen efficiencies, cooking methods, knife selection and 'mise en place') and how often the skills were implemented at work. There were also 7 questions about the menu items participants serve. The Post Survey contained 9 additional questions; including Likert-scale opinion questions reflecting on the impact of the training for participants, open-ended questions regarding lessons applied or greatest take-away and a yes/no question about maintaining connections with other participants. 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 4 months after the training on January 5, 2026 and all responses were compiled and analyzed in February 2026. There were 97 out of 99 participants who completed the Pre Survey (97.9%). A total of 85 out of 99 participants completed the Post Survey (85.8%).

## Results

### Pre-Training

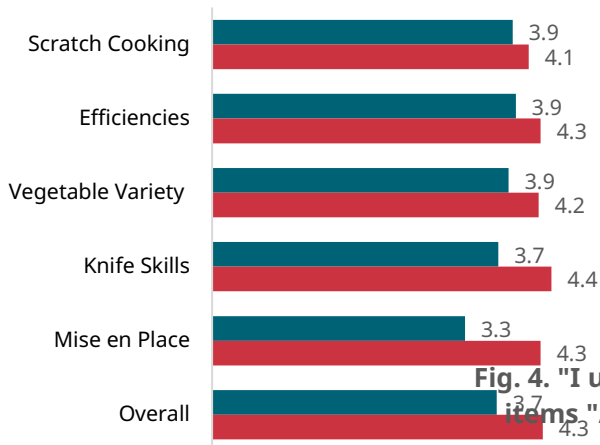
- Before the training, the majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed to being confident in utilizing kitchen efficiencies to help improve food prep & production (77%) and their scratch cooking skills (74%). Confidence using 'mise en place' techniques had the lowest agreement of participants (41%) coming into the training (Fig. 2).
- Participants utilized kitchen efficiencies to help improve food prep & production and selected proper knives based on food at least once a day coming into the training (73%). Participants implemented 'mise en place' techniques the least coming into the training, with 37% of participants using it at least once a day (Fig. 3).

- Fruit and vegetables tailored to the student population and varieties of grains were the most frequent monthly menu offering, with 75% and 66% of participants, respectively, offering these always or very often. Varieties of sandwiches (38%), sodium-free spice blends (39%) and homemade salad dressings (29%) and dips (40%) were least frequently offered (Fig. 4).

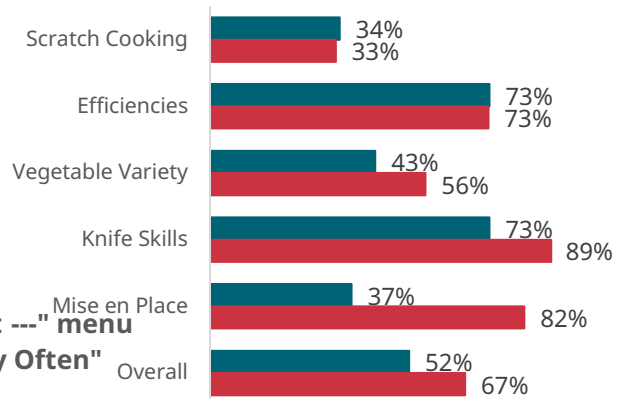
## Post-Training

- The average confidence level of participants overall rose from 3.7 to 4.3 (Fig. 1), with mise en place seeing the largest increase.
- Participants who answered strongly agree or agree regarding culinary confidence in skills rose from 65% to 90% overall (Fig. 2), with knife skills and mise en place seeing the largest increase in percentage points (30% and 48%, respectively).
- Participants who answered more than once a day or once a day regarding frequency of skill implementation rose from 52% to 67% overall (Fig. 3), with mise en place having the largest increase in percentage points (45%).
- Participants who answered always or very often regarding menu offerings rose slightly from 50% to 54% overall (Fig. 4), with spice blends and tailored fruit and vegetable options for student populations having the largest increase in percentage points (20% and 13%, respectively).
- The share of participants that strongly agreed to confidence in culinary skills rose from 19.8% pre training to 38.8% post training, a 96.1% increase.

**Fig 1. Average Change\* in Participant Confidence in Skills**

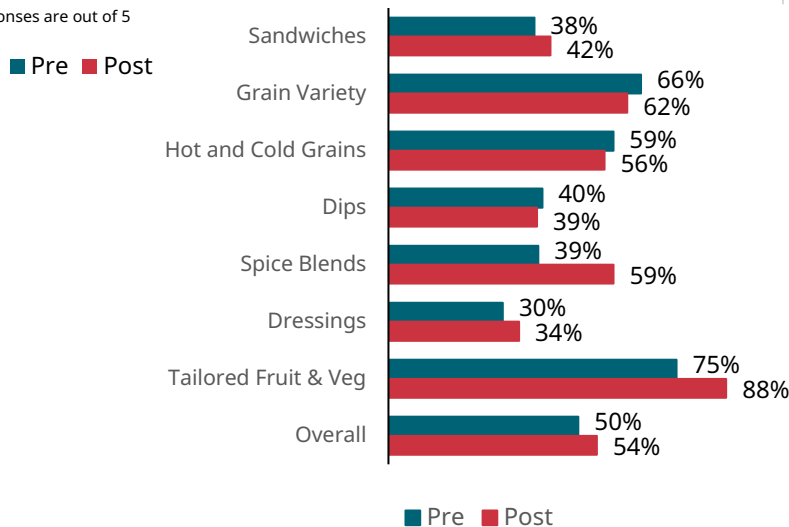


**Fig. 3. "I use/make/select ---" skill "More than once a day" & "Once a day"**



**Fig. 4. "I use/make/select ---" menu items "Always" & "Very Often"**

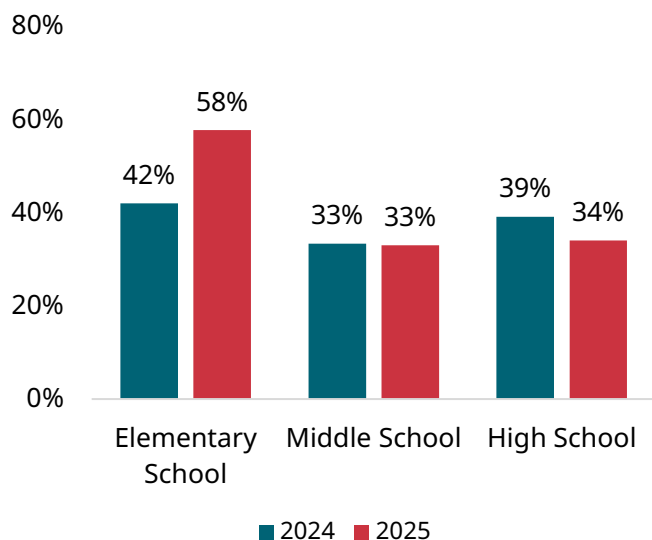
\*Average of participant responses are out of 5



**Table 1. Training Impact Was Largely Positive, Especially Regarding Increased Culinary Skills and Recommendation, n=85**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The training increased my culinary skills in the school nutrition kitchen.	40 (47.1%)	40 (47.1%)	4 (4.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.2%)
The skills I learned in the training have improved the meals we serve.	27 (31.8%)	38 (44.7%)	16 (18.8%)	3 (3.5%)	1 (1.2%)
I found the goal setting guide useful when I returned to my school kitchen.	18 (21.2%)	43 (50.6%)	21 (24.7%)	2 (2.4%)	1 (1.2%)
I would recommend this training to other school nutrition professionals.	57 (67.1%)	26 (30.6%)	1 (1.2%)	1 (1.2%)	0 (0%)
Attending this training made me feel like my workplace values me as an employee.	36 (42.4%)	29 (34.1%)	16 (18.8%)	4 (4.7%)	0 (0%)

**Fig. 5 Portion of Pre Participants Working in Elementary Schools Increased in 2025**



## Impact

### Key Points

- The highest impacts were seen around increased culinary knowledge or skills, with 94.1% of participants agreeing, and recommending the training to other school nutrition professionals, with 97.6% of participants agreeing.
- Additionally, participants felt valued as an employee by their workplace for attending the training and that the skills they learned improved the meals they served, with 76.5% of participants agreeing to both.
- Agreement on the goal setting guide being useful when returning to their school kitchens had the lowest agreement, with 71.8% of participants agreeing.
- Agreement on impact was similar between elementary and high school levels, with middle school participants agreeing slightly less (although middle school participants made up the smallest subset).
- While agreement on the impact of the trainings was very positive overall, the prevalence of strongly agree responses were lower in the 2025 culinary training as compared to the 2024 trainings.

## Connections

Participants were encouraged to share their opinions on the professional and personal connections they made during the training.

- Over 40% of the participants said they still maintained those connections, even after the training ended.
- Some themes that arose when sharing how these connections impacted their work include:
  - Increased confidence
  - Skill sharing opportunities
  - Thoughtful connections with less biased individuals
  - Meal ideas

## Training Experience

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

- Knife skills (selection and action)
  - Fruit and vegetable preparation
  - Homemade dips and spice blends
  - Individual and team culinary efficiencies
  - Management & skills confidence
  - Creating appealing foods
  - Encouraging students to try new foods
  - New mindset of innovation with recipes
  - Gaining self-confidence
- ❖ "As a director I have seen a lot of improvement in the staff that attended this training. I am very excited to have new people attend next time." – *High School staff*
  - ❖ "I [learned to] be more open minded and willing to try new things in my kitchen even if they might not be the norm" –*Elementary School staff*
  - ❖ "Food prep is easier and faster when things are organized and in front of you." – *High School staff*

## Actions Post-Training

Most actions or changes participants took since the training were related to knife skills, making spices and dressings, and mise en place. Participants have responded that they are open to experimenting with recipes and techniques and have shared efficiencies from the training to improve teamwork. Participants also shared they have begun buying in bulk, sourcing local produce and lowering waste to save money.

- ❖ "We now blanch our fresh broccoli, we use more fresh seasonings which saves us money with ordering things like Taco seasoning." – *Elementary School staff*
- ❖ "We have been using dips in different seasonings and cooking techniques and prepping techniques " – *Elementary School staff*
- ❖ "Mise en place and using the correct knife is so important." – *Elementary, Middle and High School staff*
- ❖ "Personally, I feel more comfortable and confident to do more new things and capable on doing better every time.." – *Middle School staff*