

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 17, 2016

Media Contacts:

Tara Kennon, Healthy Schools Campaign

tara@healthyschoolcampaign.org

628-888-5223

Tatum Wan

tatum@tatumwanco.com

818-590-1530



STUDENT-CREATED, HEALTHY LUNCH SERVED IN CPS

Award-Winning Cooking up Change Student Chefs Take Their Meal to Peers, Then to Congress

CHICAGO, Ill. - On Feb. 17, 2016, more than 400,000 Chicago Public Schools students lined up for a very special lunch. It was a little spicy, healthy and 100 percent designed by their peers. The recipes were created by culinary arts students Marshawn Gibson, Jalize Harmonponcedeleon, Neidy Mejia and Natalie Ruiz from Washington High School, who won first place in Healthy Schools Campaign's (HSC) Cooking up Change healthy cooking contest last October, beating 15 other teams from across the city.

Cooking up Change, now in its ninth year, is a healthy cooking contest that puts student voices front and center in the local and national dialogue about school food. Winning recipes become part of the school lunch menu in CPS, and the winning team will travel to Washington, D.C. in June, to present their meal on Capitol Hill and compete in the national finals against other teams from across the nation.

Rochelle Davis, HSC president and CEO, said, "Cooking up Change is an opportunity for students to present their vision for the healthy and delicious meals they'd like to eat in school every day."

Washington's winning meal features a Cajun chicken lettuce wrap, roasted corn relish and deconstructed peach and yogurt pizza. In addition to providing all-important appeal to students, the meal meets strict nutrition standards and uses only ingredients commonly available in a school kitchen.

"It took a lot of thinking and a lot of going over, because we couldn't use salt or add sugar," said Washington student chef Marshawn Gibson. "We had to go back to our basic culinary training. We had to figure out where you can get natural sugars and salt to get the right flavoring." Despite the challenges, "Cooking up Change has been a great experience," he said. "I never knew how much fun cooking could be."

As the meal was served across CPS, the winning student chefs celebrated with classmates, culinary instructors, family, community members and elected officials at a special lunchtime event at Washington High School. In June, they will travel to Washington, D.C., for the national finals, a briefing on Capitol Hill and a special tasting event for the Senate.

“Through their participation in Cooking up Change, students aren’t just learning how to cook, they’re gaining a better understanding of nutrition, health and wellness. And it’s an opportunity for them to inform the menu. At the end of the day, kids are looking for flavor,” said Leslie Fowler, director of nutrition support services at CPS.

Cooking up Change is generously supported by a team of sponsors that includes Presenting sponsor, Aramark; Patron sponsor, Aetna; Hero sponsor, Sammons Financial Group; Champion sponsors School Health Corporation and Whole Foods Market; Official Culinary Partner, James Beard Foundation; Official Travel Partner, Southwest; and National Silver Sponsor, American Federation of Teachers.

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About Healthy Schools Campaign

Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring that all children have the opportunity to learn and thrive in a healthy school environment. HSC advocates for policies and practices that support lifelong learning and health, including support for nutritious school food, physical activity, school health resources and safe, healthy facilities with clean indoor air. For more information, please visit www.healthyschoolscampaign.org.

About Cooking up Change

Cooking up Change is a healthy cooking contest for high school student chefs. With the guidance of a chef instructor and dietitians, teams are challenged to prepare a tasty, nutritious meal that meets the nutritional standards and cost constraints that school food service staff face every day. Cooking up Change allows students to engage community and national leaders in a dialogue about healthy school meals. For more information, please visit www.CookingupChange.org.