

Middle school students build social-emotional skills through cooking

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Students from Capital Collegiate Preparatory Academy at Kitchen of Life. (Spectrum News 1/ Tonisha Johnson)

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Middle school students are getting the lesson of a lifetime through Kitchen of Life.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- **The nonprofit pairs teams of students with volunteers from the community**
- **Students spend weeks at a time learning how to cook**
- **They also build their social-emotional skills each week as they learn to work with one another**

For weeks, middle school students from Capital Collegiate Preparatory Academy in Columbus have taken time out of their regular day and made a trip to Kitchen of Life. Each week they've spent time focusing on things like autonomy, competence, communication and belonging.

It's all skills that have helped each student to grow not just in the kitchen, but at home and in the classroom.

"I think that that's really nice that we can connect with the community and connect with home and connect with school," said teacher Jacques McCoy. "And I think that when we get more opportunities like that, it just creates more opportunities for the students to be able to learn and grow."

Growth is key as many students during the pandemic fell behind, but he said the exposure to Kitchen of Life has opened up a whole other world to a number of students and helped students improve their behavior and grades.

Sixth grader Mi'Tez Nevius is one of those students. His behavior is much better these days and his grades are too.

"Last year I was getting B's and C's," he said. "This year, I was getting A's and B's."

Plus, he's been inspired and motivated to cook at home. The recipes students receive at Kitchen of Life are recipes they can take with them. Since Nevius is typically one of the first up and getting ready for school, he's always looking for what he's going to eat for breakfast.

Now that he can make smoothies, quesadillas and other things, he said he gets the chance to eat something other than Ramen before going to school. Proud of the skills he's acquired, he said he doesn't just cook for himself, but his siblings and his mom, too.

Through the program, administrators said they are hoping the current students will inspire and motivate others to go on the next go around, who have not attended Kitchen of Life. For now, students and adults are grateful for the experience and look forward to being a part of it again soon.