

Ashe County High School Culinary Team Brings Home Medal in 2025 North Carolina Jr. Chef Competition

In March, five high school finalist teams gathered to compete in the annual North Carolina Jr. Chef cook-off, showcasing their culinary skills by creating innovative school lunch entrée recipes. Ashe County Schools is proud to announce that the Ashe County High School culinary team — Sylvia P., Kiera B., and John C. — “Gordon Ramsey’s Minions,” earned a fourth-place silver medal for their Baked Chicken Empanadas, served with roasted sweet potato rounds, homemade bean dip and salsa verde.

The competition was a true test of creativity and culinary expertise. All participating teams were tasked with developing a recipe for a school lunch entrée that met various nutritional standards while incorporating at least two North Carolina-grown products and one USDA Foods item. Each recipe needed to be student-friendly, nutritious, and easily replicable by school nutrition programs.



"This remarkable achievement is a testament to the talent, dedication, and teamwork of our students and their mentors," said Dr. Eisa Cox, Superintendent of Ashe County Schools. "Our culinary team not only showcased their skills but also demonstrated how school meals can be innovative, nutritious, and delicious. We are incredibly proud of them and look forward to seeing their passion for culinary arts continue to grow."

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Mo Green congratulated all the finalists, emphasizing the real-world value of the competition.

"Congratulations to each of the NC Jr. Chef teams," Green said. "The NC Jr. Chef Competition is a wonderful collaboration among school and community partners to offer students an opportunity to explore future career options and apply lessons learned in the classroom to a real-world application in creating recipes for appealing, nutritious school meals."

This year's competition saw the "Knights of Culinary" team from Durham Public Schools' Northern High School claim first place with their chipotle beef and sweet potato skillet, earning a gold medal. The "Cloudy with a Chance of Pasta" team from Martin County High secured

second place with their Chicken Parmesan Pasta, while the “Blazin’ Bulldogs” from Thomasville High earned third place with their Chicken Philly Cheese Bowl.

Teams were evaluated on various criteria, including recipe development, use of local ingredients, culinary skills, food safety, teamwork, and public presentation. The students also worked closely with their local school nutrition administrators to ensure their recipes could be incorporated into the school lunch program.

Rachel Findley, Senior Director for School Nutrition at NCDPI, highlighted the importance of the competition’s focus on local agriculture. “In addition, students learn about farm to school and how schools and farms can work together to provide agriculture and nutrition education and incorporate locally grown foods in school meals.”

The NC Jr. Chef competition, which aims to inspire future culinary professionals and promote healthy eating, was organized by the N.C. Department of Public Instruction in collaboration with the N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services’ Farm to School Program and other partners.

The top three teams were awarded certificates, medals, and NC Jr. Chef coats and hats. The first-place team will go on to compete in the Southeast Jr. Chef Competition at Sullivan University in Kentucky in May. Additionally, Sullivan University will offer scholarships to the members of the top three teams.

Ashe County Schools is proud of the achievement of the “Gordon Ramsey’s Minions” and looks forward to continuing to support student involvement in culinary arts and nutrition education.

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