

FCS Insights

Newsletter of the MS Ed in Family & Consumer Sciences Program
Department of Family, Nutrition, & Exercise Sciences



Issue 2



Welcome...
to our Fall '25 issue!

Thank you for returning to FCS Insights, where our MS Ed students share the real work happening in Family & Consumer Sciences classrooms across New York and beyond. This issue showcases what makes FCS education distinctive: our teachers don't just deliver curriculum, they create experiences that help students discover their capabilities, build practical skills, and develop confidence that extends far beyond the classroom. Whether it's a sixth grader mastering knife techniques with carrots they grew themselves, a high school student learning leadership through a "3 Before Me" protocol, or middle schoolers connecting home responsibilities to workplace success, the articles ahead reveal how FCS teachers transform everyday moments into powerful learning opportunities.

Our contributors, all practicing educators pursuing graduate study, share strategies you can use tomorrow: managing

hands-on labs more effectively, integrating meaningful literature into life skills units, designing authentic assessments that mirror real-world challenges, and building partnerships that extend learning beyond classroom walls.

Why does FCS Matter?

In an educational landscape increasingly focused on standardized outcomes, Family & Consumer Sciences remains committed to developing the whole person. Our teachers prepare students not just for careers, but for life. We teach them to solve problems, work collaboratively, persist through challenges, and take pride in their own competence. We hope these insights from the field inspire your own practice and remind you why this work matters.

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SECTION 1: Teaching Strategies & Classroom Management

3 Before Me: Building Student Independence in the Kitchen

In my high school culinary classroom, implementing the “3 Before Me” strategy has dramatically improved student autonomy, teamwork, and problem-solving during hands-on cooking labs. The concept is simple: when students face a challenge—whether it’s uncertainty about a knife technique, confusion about a recipe step, or a question about equipment—they must first seek help from three peers, review posted resources, or revisit their recipe before requesting teacher intervention.

This strategy mirrors real-world professional kitchens, where chefs must rely on one another to troubleshoot issues efficiently. By establishing this protocol early in the semester, students learn to communicate more effectively, share expertise, and become active participants in their own learning.

Before introducing the “3 Before Me” rule, I modeled it through a mini-lesson and role-play activity. Students brainstormed examples of appropriate peer support, such as re-explaining a technique or locating a resource in the classroom, versus simply giving answers. We created a colorful “3 Before Me” visual posted in each kitchen as a reminder. During labs, I reinforced the strategy by praising groups that showed effective collaboration and by tracking how often students were able to solve problems independently before seeking my help.

During a lab on knife skills, one of my students, Soleil, was unsure how to properly hold a chef’s knife. Instead of calling me over right away, she asked her classmate Nadya, who demonstrated how to grip the blade with her thumb and index finger and wrap her other fingers around the handle. Nadya also modeled the correct wrist motion. By the time I circled back to their kitchen, Soleil was confidently dicing tomatoes, this was a true example of peer learning in action.

Just this past week, during our yeast bread pretzel lab, Marcus’s group noticed their dough wasn’t rising as expected. They consulted two other groups before finding the answer—they had placed their bowl near an open window in their kitchen. After relocating the dough and covering it with a warm towel, they successfully resolved the issue on their own and their dough began to rise. Before using “3 Before Me,” my classroom dynamic was much more teacher-centered. Students would follow me around the classroom, or would barely let me leave my desk; they had simple questions that their peers could have easily answered. On average, I was answering 25–30 student questions per 42 minute lab, which limited my ability to circulate the classroom.

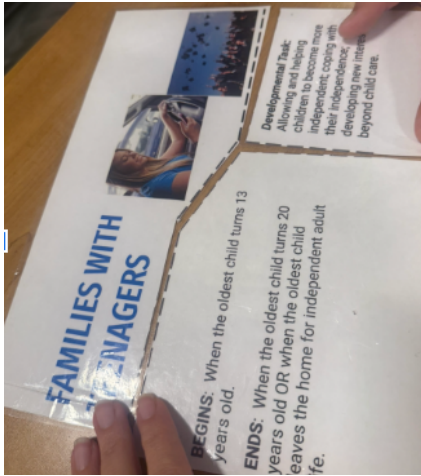
After implementing the strategy, interruptions decreased by roughly 60%, according to my observation logs over three lab periods. Students became more confident, and I noticed deeper group discussions. Instead of waiting for me, they began communicating better, experimenting and supporting each other. The overall pace of labs improved, and cleanup time decreased because students were better at managing themselves and their stations. A direct quote from my announced observation earlier this month: “I was impressed with the level by which students interacted with each other and the minimal role Ms. Rywalt needed to take as facilitator.” - Lou Adipietro, Interim Principal. To prevent the same students from always serving as “helpers,” I introduced a rotating “kitchen expert” chart. Each week, different students take on mini-leadership roles based on their strengths, such as equipment manager, recipe reader, or safety captain. This structure ensures that every student practices giving and receiving support.

Additionally, I printed “go-to guides” for each kitchen for common issues (like measuring conversions or oven troubleshooting; those pesky timers!!) so quieter or less confident students can still find answers independently. As part of each lab reflection and exit ticket, I ask, “Who helped you today?” and “Who did you help?”, encouraging students to recognize the value of everyone’s contributions.

“3 Before Me” transformed my culinary classroom into a collaborative, student-driven environment. Beyond saving instructional time, it nurtures leadership, communication, and critical thinking, skills that will serve students in any kitchen or career path.

Jamie Rywalt
Valley Central High School, Montgomery NY
Food Core - Grades 9-12

Pattern Guides in Action: Teaching Vocabulary Through Collaboration



As part of FNES747: Analysis of Teaching FCS, Professor Barnaby introduced a variety of strategies for effective vocabulary acquisition. One of the materials I developed in this course applied the pattern guides strategy, centered around Duvall's Stages of the Family Life Cycle. The pattern guide strategy has created a collaborative and discovery environment the students prefer over lecture, notes, or reading to gain new topic knowledge of terms and sequences. Not only do students seem to enjoy this activity, increased communication and references to the family life cycle has been observed beyond the close of the unit. Students are bringing this knowledge into both the Child Development and Financial Literacy units.

I've begun using this activity during the first few days of each quarter with my new groups of students. It not only introduces our Family Life Cycle unit but also encourages students to communicate, collaborate, and connect with classmates, many of whom they are meeting for the first time. When students enter the classroom, each receives one piece of a puzzle (eight different puzzles with three pieces each, for a total of twenty-four pieces). Their challenge is to find the two classmates who hold the pieces to complete their puzzle. The puzzle is complete when students can match the name of the stage (includes images), the developmental task of the stage, and the timeframe of the stage.

Although the stages are new to them, students rely on picture clues and conversation to successfully find their matches. The activity typically takes about 15 minutes with a class of 24 students. At the beginning you hear a lot of debate; typically centered on the picture and words they may already know (Teenager, Beginning, etc). Students begin constructing their own knowledge and understanding of the stages through this debate and discussion, noticing differences within the stages. Although a few students will be seen hanging on the outskirts of the group listening and waiting to be approached, they will eventually join in the discussion and become part of a triad. This activity typically progresses slowly and then picks up speed once puzzles are completed and pieces get eliminated. Reminders may need to be given to continue talking and circulating when there seems to be a stall in communication or movement. Eventually all puzzles are complete and students celebrate their grit.

The activity naturally adjusts to my large, mixed-ability classes, as the task becomes easier once several puzzles are completed, narrowing down options for the remaining students. Scaffolding isn't always necessary due to the collaboration and reduction of choices. If needed, select students can be given the puzzle piece with the pictures on it to assist them in communicating with the group.

Once all students have completed their puzzles and are in their new triads, group work is paused to focus and reflect on the strategies we used to succeed with this difficult activity. Students work in their triad for the rest of the unit to investigate and report on the rewards and challenges within the stage as well as technology and community supports available to assist families in the stage. Their group also identifies financial needs of the family. They serve as the experts on this stage when holding class discussions and comparing stages. This strategy has proven instrumental in building excitement, fostering relationships, and sparking discussions on grit and perseverance. It's a powerful way to blend content learning with social connection, setting the tone for an engaging and supportive classroom community.

Melissa Carrodo
7th Grade FCS Teacher
Manheim Township Middle School – Lancaster, PA

The Power of Live Demonstration: Teaching Culinary Techniques

This year, as I begin my second year of teaching Family and Consumer Sciences, I feel much more confident in both my teaching abilities and my understanding of the curriculum. To continue growing as an educator, I want to incorporate additional strategies into my teaching. One of my goals is to demonstrate more culinary techniques to my class, instead of relying on videos or verbal explanations. Live demonstrations are beneficial as they allow learners to see firsthand how to complete a task, using the exact tools and resources available to them.

One of the classes I teach is called Culinary Foundations. It is a freshman elective that piggybacks off middle school home and careers. The course aims to teach students the basics of cooking including safety and sanitation, the role of ingredients, and various cooking/baking techniques. This is my first year teaching this specific course, and I thought it would be a great opportunity to start incorporating demonstrations.

Students' first time in the high school FCS kitchens are for the egg lab, where everyone is responsible for cooking one egg in the style of choice. Eggs are a perfect starting point since they are a versatile and relatively inexpensive ingredient. To get students thinking, I began the lesson with a quick instant activity of having tables list as many ways that they could cook an egg, including hardboiled, soft-boiled, omelet style, scrambled, deviled, and more. The number of creative ideas that the class came up with exceeded my expectations, proving that they had a deeper understanding of the topic than I initially thought. I then had students pull up a chair to form a semi-circle around one of the kitchens.

I started the lesson by reviewing where the essential supplies, like pots, pans, mixing bowls and spatulas are located as the setup of the culinary room in the high school is different from the middle school's layout. From here, I demonstrated step-by-step how to cook scrambled, over easy, sunny side up, poached, and hard-boiled eggs. I explained and carried out specific criteria including the importance of putting butter on a pan, and safety precautions for boiling water, including the importance of not creating a splash when carefully dropping an egg in as it may result in a burn. During my demonstration, I called volunteers up to assist me in jobs like whisking, cracking, or flipping the eggs.

Once the cooking was complete, I sliced the eggs of different styles and allowed students to taste, noting the difference in texture. For example, in a poached egg, the white is fully cooked while the yolk remains runny. In a hard-boiled egg, both the yolk and the white are cooked through. Sunny-side-up and over-easy eggs are similar since both are fried, but in sunny-side-up, the egg is not flipped, leaving the top side slightly less cooked. Students were eager to try

the various eggs. I provided salt, pepper, ketchup and mild hot sauce for them to season with. Allowing students to see and taste the different eggs, rather than simply reading or hearing about the differences in styles, provides the opportunity to deepen understanding through direct experience.

The following class, we reviewed the various cooking techniques, and each student was given one egg at the beginning of the period. I instructed the class that part of their grade was to be responsible. They could not play with their egg and if they cracked it before it was time to cook, they would lose points. I even suggested placing the eggs in a custard cup, rather than the counter while setting up to prevent the eggs from rolling onto the ground. Everyone listened and no eggs were cracked too soon! This proves the power of demonstration over verbal explanation. When students are actively involved in the learning process, they are more likely to be engaged, excited, and remember key information. Groups of four headed into their kitchen. We have four stoves in the classroom, which each allows for 2 students to cook their eggs at a time. The students were so excited to show off their eggs to each other. Hands-on modeling from the previous class gave them the confidence and understanding to work independently.

During all food labs, students are assessed based on a department rubric that includes categories such as adherence the job schedule, following the steps of the recipe, time management, teamwork and cooperation, and condition of their kitchen at the end of the period (cleanliness). Throughout the period, I circulated the classroom and made observations as well as provided feedback. While all students were successful in cooking their egg in their chosen style with no major errors, I did need to provide extra assistance to those who chose the poached method. This tells me that next time I must provide further clarification and possibly a slower demonstration of this particular cooking style.

Now, my students are ready to move on to more complex recipes, like monkey bread, tacos, and garlic knots, and I am excited to continue demonstrating new techniques to help them grow their culinary skills.

Jenna Messina
Wantagh High School

SECTION 2: Hands-On Learning & Authentic Experiences

Cooking Under Pressure: A Week-Long Chopped Challenge

Last spring at Hampton Bays High School, my Culinary Arts students faced a challenge designed not only to test their cooking skills, but to develop resilience, teamwork, and real-world problem-solving: a week-long Chopped-style cooking competition. This experience was inspired by research comparing the effects of competition and cooperation in learning. Well-designed competition can elevate excitement, motivation, and skill mastery, but research consistently shows students thrive most when competitive pressure is balanced with cooperative learning, supportive feedback, and reflection. That balance guided every aspect of this event.

Each day, five teams arrived with no idea what mysterious ingredients awaited them. At first, confusion and nervousness prevailed, but as the week progressed, the structure of rotating team leaders, sharing pantry staples, and group reflection, helped students move beyond anxiety. Disagreements over unusual flavor combinations became opportunities for discussion, compromise, and creativity. When one student struggled with mismatched flavors, another jumped in to model possible solutions, demonstrating peer-support can thrive, even in competition.

This challenge was intentionally rooted in key learning theories: Social Interdependence Theory (balancing competitive and cooperative structures), and experiential learning, which centers hands-on doing and active reflection. Each mystery basket posed a fresh, authentic problem—hallmarks of both problem-based and project-based learning (PBL/PrBL). Across the five days, the tasks grew more complex, requiring teams to draw on skills they'd practiced throughout the year (knife skills, mise en place, plating), knowledge of food safety, and soft skills like time management and collaborative decision-making.

Friday's finale was a high point: faculty judges scored dishes on a rubric measuring four criteria—creativity, taste, presentation, and teamwork. These categories assessed not just end results but process, risk-taking, and how teams responded to feedback. Analysis of the rubrics revealed interesting patterns: strong teams balanced flavors and multitasked effectively, but even top performers occasionally fell short in organization or sanitation under pressure. Groups expected to “win” sometimes faltered, while those who had struggled early surprised themselves and the judges by iterating and improving.



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Cooking Under Pressure: A Week-Long Chopped Challenge



Several important lessons emerged from this analysis. First, students who had difficulty working under time or social pressure often benefited from supportive scaffolding—pantry substitutions, time warnings, and quick teacher “consults.” Reflection sessions midway through the week allowed struggling groups to diagnose what went wrong, adjust their roles, and experience growth. It became clear that, while all students improved, some skill gaps like planning under stress or adapting recipes creatively warranted extra practice in future lessons.

This culminating event also reflected a year’s worth of preparation: repeated practice with culinary basics, emphasis on safety and collaboration, and routine exposure to group problem-solving. By building complexity gradually and scaffolding each stage, students gained both competence and confidence. Importantly, when a group began failing mid-week, class protocols emphasized peer advice and team “clinics,” helping ensure competition never came at the cost of belonging or dignity. What matters most is why this type of project has meaning beyond classroom walls. Integrating competition with a cooperative, student-centered climate teaches more than recipes or plating techniques, it develops grit, adaptability, and the confidence to take risks and learn from failure. These are the skills valued in both culinary careers and everyday life. For other Family and Consumer Sciences teachers, this model illustrates that competition, when anchored in reflection and social support, aligns perfectly with FACS values of community, family, and preparing young people for real-world challenges.

In the end, the Chopped competition was far more than a contest. It was a weeklong lesson in creativity, connection, and the lifelong value of learning by doing, where every student, not just the winners, discovered new strengths and possibilities.

Conor Curtis
Hampton Bays High School

When Students Ask to Learn: A Stovetop Cleaning Success Story

This year marks my first year at Plainedge Middle School and my third-year teaching Family and Consumer Sciences. I teach sixth-grade FACS, and one of my favorite parts of teaching is helping students gain real-world skills they can use at home and throughout their lives. I love seeing their excitement when they realize how practical and meaningful these lessons can be.

As a Family and Consumer Sciences teacher, some of the best moments in my classroom come when students take real pride in what they're learning. One recent experience stands out to me. One of my sixth-grade classes was especially eager to learn how to clean a stovetop and oven the correct way. What started as a simple conversation about kitchen safety and sanitation turned into a full hands-on project. The students were asking great questions, so I decided to take advantage of the opportunity to deepen their learning and devoted an entire period to cleaning the stovetops and ovens. I decided to pivot from a conversation to a completely different lesson once I learned that multiple students in the classroom had never had the opportunity to clean a stovetop or oven before. It was truly a perfect example of putting tomorrow's task aside and taking advantage of what is happening in the present.

With twenty-six students working in groups, we went over cleaning and safety along with talking about which products to use before starting. We went over putting on gloves, making sure that there was good ventilation, and talking about which cleaning products were the safest to use for the task at hand. For the cleaning, we decided to use a natural cleaner made of baking soda and vinegar, and Easy Off oven cleaner for the parts that needed a little more elbow grease. The students were completely engaged. I observed them scrubbing, wiping, and taking turns until every surface shined. They weren't just cleaning; they were learning teamwork, responsibility, and the satisfaction of caring for a shared space.



As students were working, I was walking around the room with a rubric to check off how well they were following directions, practicing safety, and working together. Before we started, we went over this rubric to ensure that the students knew exactly what they were supposed to be doing along with having fun and cleaning in the ovens.

By the end of class, our ovens looked brand new. The students were so proud of their hard work, and several of them expressed to me that they couldn't wait to show their families what they learned. With some asking if they can take pictures as proof to show their parents. This made me start to think about how children in today's world are missing out on basic home skills because families are simply too busy or because they are not given the opportunity to learn these skills.

It was more than just a cleaning day for me; it was a reminder of how powerful hands-on learning can be. It was a chance for students to learn life skills that will help them contribute at home, manage their resources, and build confidence in completing new tasks. It was a reminder that these small, practical lessons can have a big impact when students see the results of their own efforts. When students see the results of their effort, it sticks with them in a way that is so powerful, and that's what makes teaching FACS so rewarding.

William Reid
Plainedge Public Schools

From Garden to Table: Whole-School Harvest Learning

Planting the First Seeds: Spring 2024

Every great story begins with a seed, and at Pocantico Hills, ours was planted in the spring of 2024. That's when our school partnered with Kaleidoscope Garden Design Services to transform a patch of land into a living classroom.

As co-garden coordinator alongside Susan Regan, and in my role as Family & Consumer Sciences (FACS) teacher, I watched the first raised beds fill with rich soil and possibility. Students eagerly pressed seedlings into the earth: tiny basil plants, marigolds, and peppers. Students were learning that hands-on work can nurture both gardens and minds.

By the end of the season, every K-4 student had taken part in building our garden's foundation. That summer, we opened the gates to the community, hosting family workshops where parents, grandparents, and neighbors came to dig, plant, and connect. The garden was already growing more than vegetables. It was cultivating relationships.

Growing a Schoolwide Program: Fall 2024–Spring 2025

As fall arrived, our little garden blossomed into a full-school program. Every student, from our youngest learners in JPK to our fifth graders, stepped into the garden for seasonal lessons.

Armed with clipboards and curiosity, students measured plant growth, studied pollinators, and discussed how cultures around the world celebrate food. Lessons aligned seamlessly with New York State Standards in science, math, social studies, and FACS, but the learning felt anything but standard. It was alive.

By the close of the 2024-2025 school year, the garden had become part of the Pocantico identity: a place for discovery, collaboration, and care for the planet.

Cultivating Connections: Fall 2025

Now in its third year, the Kaleidoscope Garden Classroom has taken root across every grade level, JPK through eighth. Before the school year began, I surveyed teachers and students using Microsoft Forms to find out how the garden could best support classroom learning. Together with Kaleidoscope founders Toby Adams and Alexandra Forrester, we designed lessons that seamlessly integrated into existing curricula, encompassing science experiments, art reflections, and social-emotional learning activities.

This fall, we introduced cross-grade mentoring, pairing middle school students with younger classes.



Watching seventh graders kneel beside first graders to harvest carrots and identify herbs was pure magic. These moments embodied Pocantico's "Portrait of a Student" values: leadership, empathy, and community.

Harvest Week: Learning by Doing

By late October, the garden buzzed with excitement for Harvest Week, with our three-day celebration of all we'd grown. Students pulled up carrots, corn, beans, squash, and peppers, squealing with delight as they unearthed their own food. One student gasped, "I didn't know carrots came from the soil!"

That sense of wonder is what educational philosopher John Dewey referred to as "learning through experience." Garden-based education allows students to see, feel, and taste their lessons, transforming abstract ideas into a lasting understanding.

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From Garden to Kitchen: Culinary Integration

For our sixth graders, the harvest didn't end outdoors. In FACS class, we carried it straight into the kitchen for a hands-on lab called "Culinary Preservation: Mastering Knife Cuts to Sustain the Harvest."

With Principal Adam Brown observing, students practiced safe, precise knife skills using 3D-printed models created by our STEM teacher, Vince Cook. The next day, they chopped, blanched, and froze freshly picked vegetables, turning them into ingredients for our Harvest Soup. The lesson blended science, nutrition, sustainability, and teamwork, the heart of Family & Consumer Sciences education.

Cultivating Lifelong Learners

Over the course of three short years, our garden has evolved from a pilot project into a symbol of what's possible when learning extends beyond the classroom walls. Students aren't just studying life cycles; they're living them. They're practicing patience, curiosity, and stewardship with every seed they plant.

As the Kaleidoscope Garden Classrooms continue to flourish, so do our students. The garden stands as a reflection of their journey: rooted in curiosity, nourished by collaboration, and reaching ever upward toward new growth.

A Living Lesson

The Pocantico Hills garden-to-table initiative reminds us that authentic learning doesn't just happen at a desk. It happens with hands in the soil, hearts in the community, and minds open to discovery.

By connecting our FACS curriculum with the rhythms of the natural world and aligning it with district goals and state standards, we're cultivating something far greater than vegetables. We're cultivating thoughtful, compassionate learners who recognize that the care we give to the earth is the care we give to one another.



Alyson Morilla
Pocantico Hills

A Taste of France in the Classroom: Teaching Culture Through Culinary Arts

This semester in my International Foods class, we took a culinary journey to France, a country where food and culture go together. Instead of just reading about French traditions, we explored how meals connect to everyday life, celebrations, and even national identity. One of the most rewarding parts of this unit was discovering how deeply the French value the experience of eating together. Unlike in the U.S., where meals can be quick and, on the go, French meals are often slower, social, and centered around connection. Students were surprised to learn that many French families sit down together for long Sunday lunches, a tradition that reinforces family bonds and highlights the importance of community.

To bring the culture alive, our class researched regional specialties, like buttery croissants from Paris, seafood from Brittany, and creamy cheeses from



Normandy. Then we tried our hands at making fresh crêpes in class. What started as a challenge quickly turned into one of the most engaging lessons of the semester. Students learned key techniques such as spreading the batter thinly across the pan, controlling heat to avoid over browning, and flipping delicate crêpes without tearing them. These small skills became lessons in patience, focus, and teamwork. Some students struggled at first, either flipping too soon or pouring too much batter, but through trial and error they adjusted the heat, greased pans properly, and helped one another troubleshoot. Watching them move from frustration to confidence was one of the most rewarding moments of the food lab.

Managing the crêpe lab requires careful planning. Students rotated between batter making, cooking, and filling stations, which encouraged collaboration and allowed everyone to contribute to the lab. We discussed safety with hot pans and utensils, emphasizing mise en

place and communication. To accommodate dietary restrictions, I offered my students a gluten free batter and a variety of fillings so everyone could participate fully. Sweet fillings included strawberries, blueberries, and powdered sugar. These choices reflected real French café offerings and helped students understand the balance of flavors in French cuisine.

Beyond the kitchen, this unit lesson encouraged students to think critically about food's cultural significance. It wasn't just about following a recipe; it was about understanding why food matters in different cultures. Students examined café etiquette, regional traditions, and the role of meals in daily French life. Many came to realize that in France, food is not simply sustenance; it's an expression of identity, history, and values. As one student reflected, "I didn't just learn how to make a crêpe; I learned why it matters."

To conclude the lesson, students created mini presentations that connected French food to culture and traditions. The creativity they showed was remarkable. One group transformed their space into a "French café corner" complete with music, table décor, a mock menu, and short phrases in French. Their menu featured croque monsieur sandwiches, café au lait, and strawberry crêpes inspired by authentic Parisian menus. Other groups
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explored French holidays, etiquette, and regional dishes, integrating decorations, language, and music to enhance authenticity. These presentations demonstrated not only their understanding of French cuisine but also their appreciation for the cultural values embedded within it.

I assessed both culinary skills and cultural understanding using a rubric that emphasized accuracy of research, presentation creativity, teamwork, and authenticity. Through their work, I learned a lot about my students' perceptions of culture. At first, many associated French foods only with pastries or fancy dining. By the end, they were discussing how mealtime reflects values of connection, relaxation, and appreciation. One student shared that she realized French people "don't just eat, they dine," capturing the deeper takeaway I hoped they would find. Their ability to connect food to identity showed that learning extended far beyond the kitchen.

From an educator's perspective, this project reinforced the power of teaching culture through food. Food serves as an accessible and engaging lens through which students can explore geography, history, and social values. It also nurtures empathy and global awareness that extends beyond the classroom. I grew as a teacher by learning to balance logistics, safety, and creativity while facilitating meaningful discussions. Integrating research, cooking, and presentation strengthened not only engagement but also interdisciplinary thinking.

Managing time, dietary needs, and cleanup required flexibility, but the payoff was worth it: a class full of laughter, curiosity, and authentic learning.

This project highlights how culinary education can deepen cultural literacy. Food lessons can and should go beyond flavor to explore identity, values, and traditions. They encourage students to ask essential questions: How do cultural beliefs shape what and how we eat? How can learning about global cuisines promote understanding and respect? And how can we adapt these lessons for diverse classrooms with limited resources?

Looking ahead, I plan to expand this project by incorporating more technology, perhaps having students design digital menus or record short cooking videos in the style of travel documentaries. I'd also love to bring in guest speakers or community members with French heritage to share real life stories and recipes. With basic equipment, common ingredients, and a spirit of curiosity, any teacher can recreate this experience.

In the end, the France unit reminded all of us that food isn't just about eating; it's about community, tradition, and identity. When students cook with purpose, they don't just learn about another culture, they live it. And as their teacher, I was reminded that the kitchen is one of the most powerful classrooms we have.

Michael Gregori
Sewanhaka Public Schools



SECTION 3: Connecting FCS to Life & Career Readiness

Home Skills as Career Prep: Connecting Life Skills to the Workplace

This fall, I taught a Careers unit for the first time with my 7th graders, and I wanted the lessons to have a strong sense of flow from one topic to the next. This unit took place over the course of 8 days, where we explored different career clusters and identified hard skills required in different professions. Since I couldn't cover all 16 career clusters, 9 of the most popular choices from a student poll were covered. Some of these more popular clusters were hospitality and tourism, arts, law and public safety, education, information technology, and so many more!

Once students understood some of the technical skills required in the career cluster they were interested in, I introduced soft skills, which are the personal qualities that help people grow and succeed in any workplace. Instead of simply defining and comparing the two, I wanted students to experience how these soft skills are different than what they had experienced with hard skills, and how they show up in real life every day, especially in ways they might not expect. So, we got hands-on!

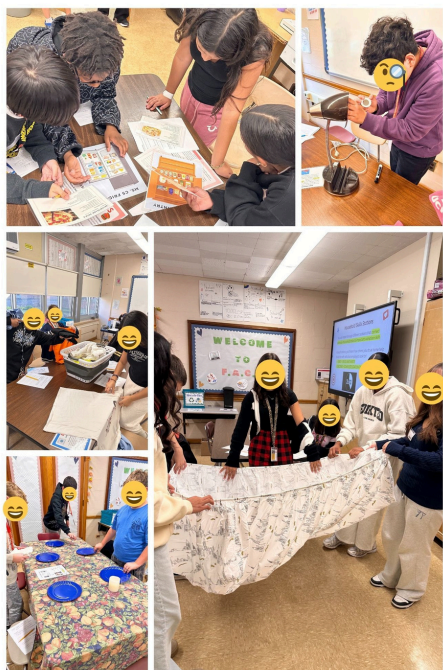
For this 40-minute lesson, students rotated through 5 stations in groups of 3-4. Each station was built around an everyday home skill that students hopefully were familiar with. The stations included activities like setting a table, changing a lightbulb, sorting and folding laundry, meal planning, and even a "chore challenge" where they had to sweep a floor, sort the garbage, clean the mirror, wipe down a counter, and (the fan favorite) fold a fitted sheet. Each activity was chosen because it required a different soft skill, like attention to detail, organization, teamwork, problem-solving, responsibility, and time management.

This lesson did take a lot of prep, as there were a lot of materials needed for each of the stations. Each table has a description card with the home skill name, the soft skill being built, how it builds that skill, and why it's important in a future career. With this, each table also had directions on how to complete the task at hand. Then, for the stations you needed, 3 laundry baskets, laundry, rechargeable light bulbs (one charged and one not charged), a lamp, dinner plates, napkins, forks, knives, spoons, cups, a tablecloth, a fitted sheet, "garbage" and recyclables, a trash bin, a recycle bin, cut-up pipe cleaners, paper towels, cleaning spray (Mult surface), broom and dust pan, and the printouts for the planning a meal station. Once each of the stations was put together, students were also asked to fill out a guided notes worksheet on what they were experiencing and reflect. The questions asked at each station were, "Which soft skill did you use here?", "How could this skill be useful in a future job?", and "What evidence shows that you used that skill?". These questions were the key to helping students recognize the transfer between practice at home and application in the workplace. One student reflected, "Folding laundry made me use organization and patience, which I might need if I were sorting supplies in a medical office." Another said, "I have never changed a lightbulb before. It took a lot of trial and error, but in the end me, my group and I figured it out. I would probably use this skill a lot in my future because I want to be an architect."

For assessment, I used quick check-ins and observation notes during each timed rotation. I also collected their worksheets with the questions on each of the stations. At the end of each lesson, I also ask students to reflect on what they thought of the activity and what they took away from it. I had a lot of students respond with a similar answer that they do a lot of these activities at home and weren't aware of their value for their future career until this lesson, which was exactly my goal. I have always strayed away from the careers unit in the past because I feel like it can be so hard to make this meaningful for students when a job can feel so far away for most of them. Being able to translate this information into activities they are familiar with and relate to make this unit feel age-appropriate while also following standards.

This lesson not only prepared students for thinking about future careers but also set them up for success in our next FACS unit: sewing. Beginning sewing right after this unit felt natural because sewing is itself a practical home skill, but the connection went even deeper. We kicked off the sewing unit with a class debate on why sewing matters and which careers rely on it, from costume

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design and tailoring to interior decorating and even medicine. That conversation brought us right back to the career focus and made the transition feel intentional. It also allowed us to connect the soft skills practiced in the stations to sewing, while adding in new ones like hand-eye coordination and precision. Students immediately noticed how the patience, attention to detail, organization, and focus they'd practiced while folding a fitted sheet or changing a lightbulb transferred directly to threading a needle and beginning their first stitches on their felt samples. Overall, I feel that this lesson had a great impact on my students, and I will be doing it again in the future!

Amelia Craparotta
Woodland Middle School

A Lesson in Cultural Appreciation: Bachata and FACS

Recently I had the privilege of seeing a performance during the Hispanic Heritage Month Assembly. One part of the showcase was a presentation about the history of Bachata in the Dominican Republic and a student performance. Students displayed the distinctive eight step pattern with its characteristic hip sway. The roar of applause and cheers from the audience was deafening, so much so that my watch was flashing a "loud environment" warning. This moment was not just a celebration of music, but rather a celebration of culture, resilience, and identity.

Bachata is a musical tradition that originated from marginalized communities in the Dominican Republic. In her book, "Bachata: A Social History of a Dominican Popular Music," Tufts Professor Deborah Pacini Hernandez traces the roots of Bachata from 1920's Cuba that evolved in the Dominican Republic. In the 1940s and 50s, the country was under the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo, who censored this music. The cultural elite looked down upon music because it was about the struggles of the working class and was often performed in bars and brothels (Civita, 2024). However after Trujillo's death, bachata, which was nicknamed "música de amargue" or music of bitterness, left the country and spread to the cities. What was once considered a lower-class expression, gained popularity, first to neighboring countries and decades later, around the world. Today Bachata is played at many family gatherings and has a wide spread audience. Popular artists such as Shakira and Rosalia have showcased this music. Bachata has even spread to the American music world with crossover performances with Justin Timberlake and The Weeknd.

Seeing this performance made me reflect on the importance of teaching cultural appreciation in all contents, including FACS. It is our duty, as educators, to help students practice the skills of cross-cultural understanding and empathy. The foundation of these skills is understanding the difference between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation. Cultural appropriation is when aspects of another culture are used without regard to the historical context and the social significance. In contrast, cultural appreciation involves taking the time to thoroughly learn the history behind a cultural practice and honoring its meaning to the people who created it (Alvarez, 2025). Teaching this distinction, helps students avoid stereotyping and empowers students to engage with the deeper, nuanced lived experiences of people.

In FACS, we can model cultural appreciation by exploring global food traditions, studying different types of fashion and the beliefs that underpin them or analyze how family and society influences one's identity. These lessons show students how culture shapes the way people eat, create, and connect to each other. By doing this we can foster curiosity and appreciation of culture rather than just merely consuming culture.

One suggestion to implementing cultural appreciation in FACS is a Food and Storytelling Project where students share or write about a dish that meaningful to their family and culture. Students can discuss how food connects to their identities and sense of belonging. In this lesson, it would be essential to emphasize respect for all food traditions and to appreciate all traditions. Another example is a lesson on the origins of common ingredients such as sugar, rice, tomatoes, and cacao. Students can research how trade and migrations shaped these food traditions. This lesson would also include discussions about the indigenous origins of food and how colonization impacted them.

As teachers of the future innovators of the world, we must teach our students to celebrate and honor the diverse cultures that we come from. When we do this by modelling how to be critical thinkers, who think deeply about where cultural practices come from, we help build a more inclusive and empathetic world that celebrates our shared humanity.

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Jennifer Cheng
I.S. 318 School of Mathematics and Science Through the Arts

Feeding the Future: Why Culinary Careers Should Start in High School

As part of a recent professional development day in my school district, I had the opportunity to tour the culinary arts facilities at a local community college, which offers two pathways to a degree in culinary arts or baking and pastry; an Associated Degree (AAS) or Specialized Diploma. It was an eye-opening experience that gave me a behind-the-scenes look at how the program prepares students to be career-ready immediately after graduation.

Culinary arts today are about much more than cooking. Students are trained to meet the demands of modern eating habits, such as plant-based, gluten-free, and health-conscious diets, as well as trends that continue to grow in popularity. It was fascinating to see how technology is transforming the kitchen, with more automation being used in restaurants. Learning how to operate this equipment gives students a competitive edge as they enter the workforce.

One of the most impressive aspects of the program is the student-run restaurant on campus, which is open to faculty, students, and the public. Every dish served is prepared by the students, who rotate through all roles, line cook, pastry chef, server, host, and even management. This hands-on experience gives them a real taste of what it's like to work in a professional kitchen and dining environment. Another highlight of the program is its focus on sustainability. Students are taught to reduce waste by using every part of an ingredient, especially in meat preparation. This not only supports eco-friendly practices but also makes graduates more valuable to future employers.

I am inspired to integrate these concepts into my own classroom by inviting guest speakers not only to engage my students but also to connect with other FCS teachers in neighboring districts. This collaboration can help educators learn how to better support students who show an interest or aptitude in culinary careers. We want our students to explore their creativity, develop confidence, and discover new passions. We also want to prepare them for the future by providing the tools they need to flourish in an ever-changing world.

By introducing these opportunities early and encouraging our junior and senior high school students to consider careers in the culinary arts, we can help shape a new generation of skilled, passionate food professionals ready to feed the future.

Janis Gaglione
Stroudsburg Area School District

Finding Heart and Meaning: Using Literature to Teach Life Skills

This past year, while attending the LIFACS Conference, I was introduced to a book that truly touched my heart: *The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and The Horse* by Charlie Mackesy. It's one of those books that instantly reminded me of why I teach Family and Consumer Sciences.

In FCS, we teach more than skills. We teach life, empathy, relationships, self-discovery, and resilience; all the things that help students grow into compassionate, capable human beings. And that's exactly what this book captures. Each character in Mackesy's story represents something we all feel as we grow:

- The Boy represents curiosity and innocence, the part of us that asks questions and wants to understand the world.
- The Mole reminds us of sweetness and hope, that childlike joy in simple things.
- The Fox represents trust and healing, learning to open up again after being hurt.
- The Horse embodies wisdom, peace, and unconditional acceptance.

A Family Relationships class would use *The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and The Horse* to teach students about communication and empathy during a specific unit. Students began by reading brief excerpts in small groups, discussing the connection between being vulnerable and building trust. Students wrote reflections on love and respect in family bonds, then worked in groups to create skits demonstrating positive communication through a book quote. This activity developed emotional intelligence while helping students identify characteristics of healthy relationships.

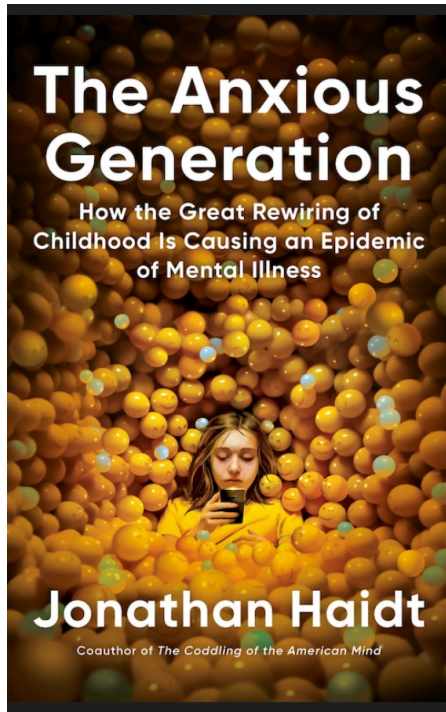
In Child Development, teachers can use the story to explore Erikson's stages as the Boy demonstrates initiative vs. guilt while the Horse represents adult self-acceptance. Students create children's storybooks based on Mackesy's themes, demonstrating how empathy, kindness, and resilience develop from childhood through adulthood while learning essential developmental concepts. This book reminds us that as FACS educators, we don't just teach content; we teach connection. We help students discover who they are, how to care for others, and how to live meaningful lives. Sometimes, a simple story like this one can bring those lessons to life more powerfully than any textbook ever could.

As the horse says, "Sometimes just getting up and carrying on is brave and magnificent."

That's what I hope my students take away, not just from this book, but from every lesson we share: that growth takes courage, kindness matters, and every stage of life has meaning.

Jenia Yashaya
Herricks High School

Fall 2025 MS Ed Book Club



In our MS Ed Family and Consumer Sciences Education Book Club, we explored Jonathan Haidt's *The Anxious Generation* to better understand the mental health crisis affecting today's youth and its implications for our field. Through discussions spanning the book's key chapters, we examined how the "great rewiring" of childhood, the shift from play-based to phone-based experiences, directly connects to core FCS domains including child development, family dynamics, nutrition and wellness, and relationship education.

As FCS educators, we are uniquely positioned to address the developmental needs Haidt identifies. Our discussions explored practical applications such as integrating sleep hygiene and digital wellness into nutrition units, teaching future parents in our child development classes about the importance of free play and age-appropriate technology boundaries, and helping students navigate the collective action problems around social media use in our family living and relationships curriculum. We also examined how FCS teachers can model healthy technology boundaries in our own classrooms while supporting the whole child through evidence-based strategies that prioritize connection, play, and well-being. This book deepened our understanding of the adolescents we serve and strengthened our capacity to support student mental health through the comprehensive lens that makes Family and Consumer Sciences education so vital.

NYS Updates



NYS now requires 18 credits in a new content area and passing score on the CST to add an additional certification. This is change from the previous 30 credit requirement.

Scan for more information.



NYS requires an update the Child Abuse Workshop for Mandated Reporters.

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