

Building Community and Promoting Health During COVID-19



Families preparing recipes on Zoom for Family Cook Night.
Photo credit: UCCE

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated social inequities, increased food insecurity for children and families, and affected access to education for adults and youth. Recognizing the uncertainty and changing guidance of COVID-19 and the importance of supporting the health and food security of families, UCCE staff partnered with school and community sites to pilot a virtual Family Cook Night series. Families in attendance commented that live, online lessons were more accessible for them compared to traditional in-person classes as transportation, transportation time, COVID safety, and childcare were not barriers to virtual learning. In addition, families were able to prepare the recipes in the familiar space of their own homes.



Ingredients and nutrition education reinforcement items for Family Cook Nights. Photo credit: UCCE

The Work

UCCE educators and school partners have hosted three Family Cook Nights (4-class series) simultaneously in English and Spanish via Zoom. Using the Healthy, Happy Families curriculum, families learned how to involve youth in cooking and meal preparation by demonstrating age-appropriate tasks and recipes, using words instead of food to praise positive behavior, enjoying family meals, and continuing to offer new foods to children even after the child disliked it the first time. Families also learned basic nutrition following MyPlate and food safety concepts.

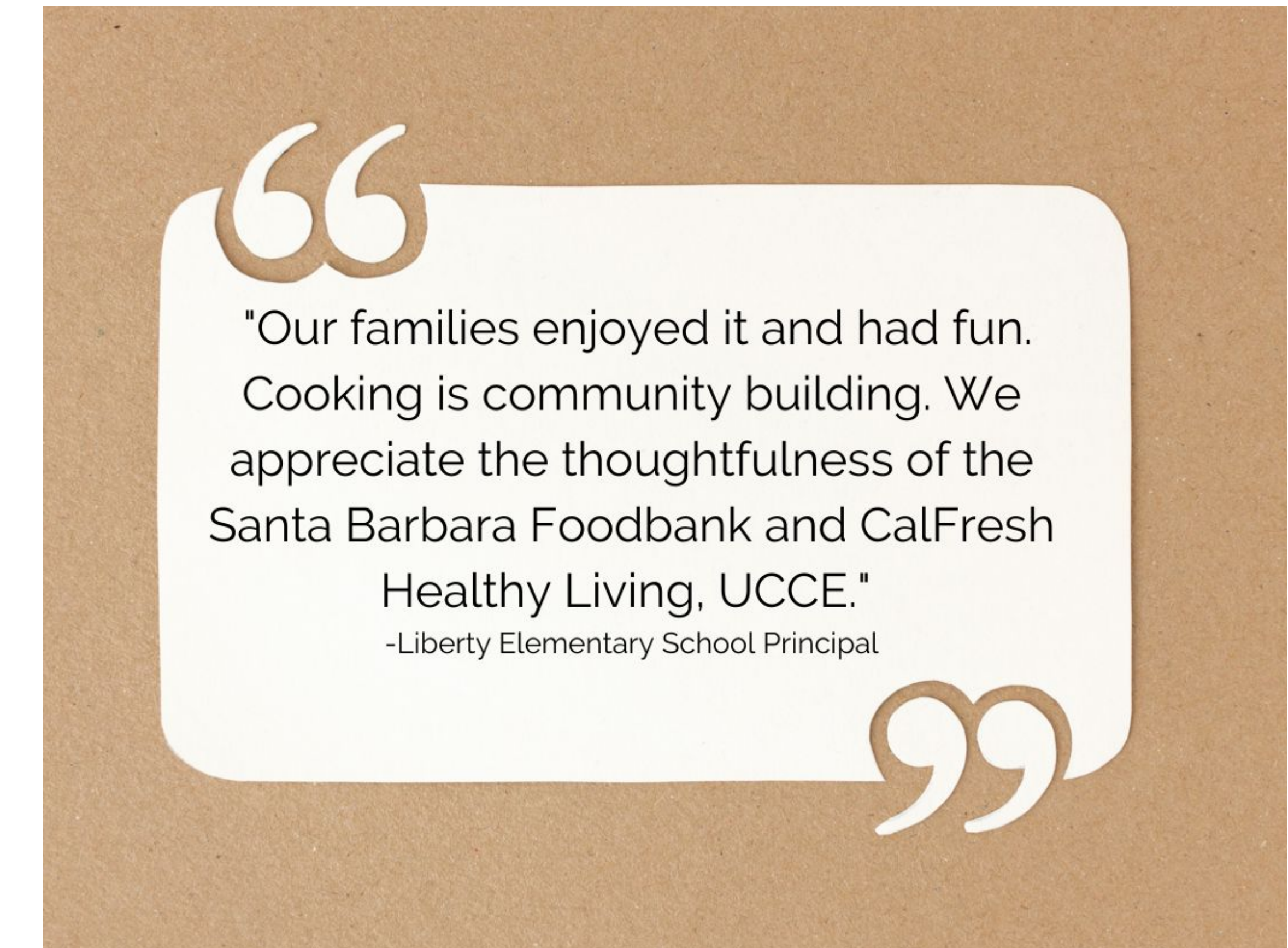
In addition, UCCE educators continued strengthening partnerships with Santa Barbara Food Bank (SBFB), school partners, youth, and families in Santa Barbara County. Families utilized resources available in their homes which made the lessons immediately applicable to their lives and situations. To support the learning and ensure engagement, supplemental materials were provided by the SBFB and UCCE including recipe ingredients, measuring cups, cutting boards, and MyPlate demonstration models.

The Impact

Eighty-five families participated in at least one session of a Family Cook Night series. Adult respondents who attended the virtual Family Cook Nights reported positive, evidence-based changes to feeding their children to encourage healthy behavior.

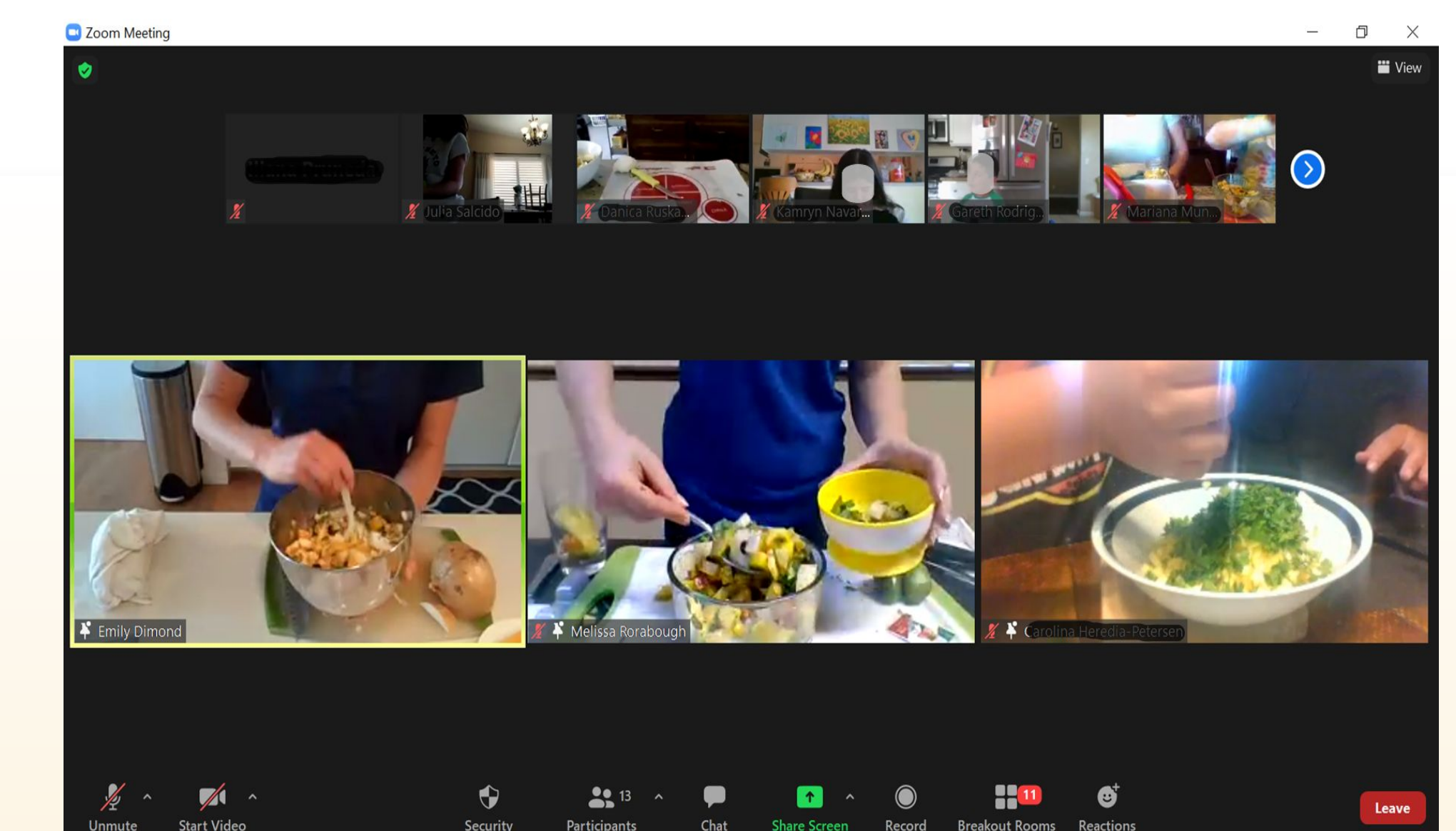
- 11 of 12 matched pre-post respondents made at least one positive change, six reported two positive changes, and one reported seven positive changes.
- From pre to post, the positive behaviors that changed the most included: not offering a treat for eating food (66%), eating snacks at the same time every day (33%), and serving food to children again after it was rejected the first few times (92%).

"Gracias a ustedes por la información que dan a la comunidad para estar más saludables"/Thank you for the information you give to the community to be healthier"
- Participating Parent



The Future

Since the pilot of Family Cook Nights three additional SNAP-Ed qualifying sites have participated in a new series with positive feedback on the virtual model. The virtual model was developed during the pandemic to meet the needs of families and schools needing engaging learning opportunities at home. However, the program has become more popular than our in-person family education and school partners continue to ask for the programming to remain in its online format. In addition, the UCCE team is working on bringing in more low-income sites to support this program in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties.



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