

St. Gabriel & Skills Academy Partnership

Who says school lunches are boring and bland? Not the kids at the new St. Gabriel Classical Academy (SGCA), which opened its doors to Preschool through 5th grade this year at St. Gabriel the Archangel Catholic Church. Hot chicken barbecue sandwiches, carnitas tacos, and homestyle macaroni and cheese are among their favorites along with vegetarian options and delicious fresh vegetables and fruits. Partnering with Skills Academy, students receive freshly prepared, farm-to-table meals four days a week.

Many know that small schools often struggle to provide a full hot lunch service, at least until the school grows to a certain size. When planning for St. Gabriel's lunch program, the school's principal, Robin Schneider, contacted Skills Academy Vocational Center, known for its leading culinary arts program among others. "When I visited their center, I was amazed at all they are doing for their students. It was a warm, welcoming place, which has been reflected in Chef Marissa, Chef Derrick, Mischa, and Kayla, who come to our school on a regular basis." Schneider added, "Partnering with them meant that we would be helping students who otherwise might not be considered. It is the right thing to do for them and for us."

The Skills Academy Vocational Center (SAVC) provides vocational and independent living programs for students 18 and up who have special needs. SAVC provides job placement, job coaching, placement in paid internships, and assists with procuring school district and state funding for qualified participants. When CEO Randee Van Ness was contacted by Mrs. Schneider, she was thrilled about partnering with SGCA to build its new school lunch program. "We wanted to partner with St. Gabriel Classical Academy and St. Gabriel the Archangel Church because we wanted to start developing a sense of the community outside of Skills Academy Vocational Center," Randee said, "Additionally, we want students to learn to be successful within their vocational field in Colorado Springs. The immediate benefits have been building self esteem, building confidence in their skills, and developing passion for the culinary arts. These community partnerships are key to developing our students for independent living and helping them thrive in an exciting vocation."

Mrs. Schneider says the school year is off to a great start and everyone is happy with this partnership. St. Gabriel students say things like "I love the food", "they know what we like", and "my Mom is thrilled that I am getting a hot lunch!" Parents report their satisfaction in knowing their kids have hot, healthy, and farm-to-table quality lunches available each week. The Skills Academy students say they are getting real world experience working in the kitchen. They also get a sense of accomplishment from the students enjoying their food so much. The St. Gabriel school staff loves seeing all of the smiling faces of the students, parents, and Skills Academy culinary team members. Together, this is a win-win for everyone.

For more information about St. Gabriel Classical Academy visit <https://stgclassical.com/> or contact Mrs. Robin Schneider at 719.418.5670. For more information on the Skills Academy Vocational Center, contact CEO Mrs. Randee Van Ness at 719-651-5102 or visit <https://www.skillsacademyvc.org/>

Skills Academy Vocational Center is a Certified Vocational School providing vocational and independent living programs, along with national certifications for specific programs. SAVC provides job placement, job coaching, placement in paid internships, and assists with procuring school district and state funding for qualified students.

The mission of St. Gabriel Classical Academy is to assist parents in their sacred duty as the primary educators of their children. We do this by providing a challenging and integrated Catholic liberal arts education; focused on Truth, Goodness, and Beauty imbued with the rich traditions of the Catholic faith. Our goal is not only academic excellence but to form children as joyful and virtuous disciples of Christ.