

## Thousand Oaks home-schoolers in the running for Jamie Oliver award

By Mark Storer

Tuesday, January 3, 2012

Students crammed around Laura Erlig in the kitchen of the Thousand Oaks Teen Center, helping prepare lunch.

Dylan Rodgers, 12, was stuffing jalapeño peppers with a nondairy cream cheese, sour cream and breadcrumb spread, while Kaylee Slingluff, also 12, was mixing cherry tomatoes, red onions and black beans with quinoa, a grain similar in texture and size to couscous.

Welcome to One Spark Academy, a private learning center for home-schooled students. Though not an accredited middle school, One Spark, which started last fall, has 19 students in sixth through eighth grades who come two to four days a week for up to seven hours a day.

Founder Lori Peters is in what she calls the startup phase of the program. But advertising or not, One Spark is about to get national recognition. The program is in the running for the best lunch in television chef Jamie Oliver's Food Foundation Revolution Best and Worst Lunches competition.

Liza Scheer, a One Spark teacher, is a fan of Oliver and learned of the competition through his website.

"I took a couple of pictures of food we make here and sent them in," she said. Peters sent in a photo as well, and now, as the

competition nears its end sometime in January, two One Spark lunches are in the top five — one in first place and one in fourth.

The first-place dish is a seasonal fruit salad mix along with a green salad of lettuce and other vegetables, pomegranate seeds, feta cheese, almonds and homemade dressing. Fourth place belongs to spaghetti squash with sauteed vegetables and a green salad.

"We believe in holistic education — in educating the whole child, and that includes what they eat," Peters said. "We want to make sure they're getting a healthy meal. It all started with the dream of, 'Wouldn't it be great to feed kids a meal that allowed them to go back to class not feeling bad or lethargic or whatever?'"

Peters handed the reins of the lunches to Erlig, who now spends a good portion of her day in pursuit of fresh ingredients.

"We have a healthy-food policy," Erlig said. "We want to prepare healthy food that rejuvenates kids and gets them ready to go, and we spend less than \$2 a day per student."

A lot of what the school does is based on experiments, Erlig said.

"We started thinking about having lemonade and how best to prepare that as a snack or refresher, but without all the sugar. That led to things like cantaloupe-flavored water and others," she said. "At first, it

was just me outside on a camp stove, but now we use the kitchen, and as part of the kids' education, a few of them come in each day and help me prepare the meal."

Menu items are mostly vegetarian or vegan.

"We use meat, but it's a secondary item," Peters said. "Some of our kids are vegetarians, some don't eat gluten, and we're sensitive to that. I simply don't accept not treating people as individuals, and that's one of the things we do with kids here."

Dylan called One Spark lunches "really good."

"I like helping out in the kitchen, too. It's a lot of fun," Dylan said.

Kaylee said: "I used to munch a bag of potato chips at home. But now I'll open a box of fresh mushrooms instead."

Information on the food competition can be found online at <http://www.jamieoliver.com/us/foundation/jamies-food-revolution/news-content/food-revolution-photo-wall-2011-round-up>. Voting will reopen after Sunday.



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Kaylee Slingluff (left) and Serena Lee carry a bowl of quinoa back to the counter to finish making a quinoa salad lunch for One Spark Academy in Thousand Oaks.

Photos by Juliette Coughlin, Special to The Star



Students at One Spark Academy (from left) Shannon Prior, Richie Sikra, Dylan Rodgers and Kaylee Slingluff line up for the fresh lunch they made. Educator Laura Erlig (right) helps the students prepare the meals. The academy is in celebrity chef Jamie Oliver's school lunch contest.



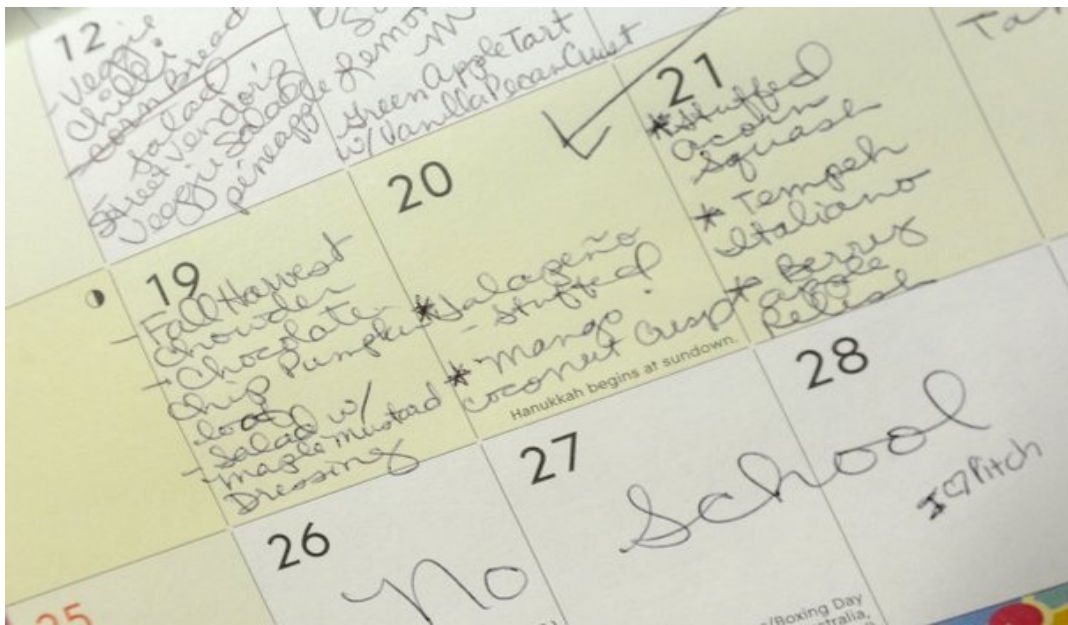
A fresh medley of black beans, corn, tomatoes, red onion, avocado and cilantro are on top of a bed of quinoa. Other options for lunch were stuffed jalapenos, a green salad, fresh fruit, and a mango and coconut crisp.



Richie Sikra (left) and Christopher Rasmussen go over instructions for a mango and coconut crisp with educator Laura Erlig during a One Spark Academy class in Thousand Oaks.



Fresh fruit is always an option for lunch at One Spark Academy in Thousand Oaks. The academy is in celebrity chef Jamie Oliver's school lunch contest.



Monday through Thursday, students in the "Food Fascination" class of One Spark Academy prepare their lunch using fresh ingredients. The menu this day included quinoa salad, vegetarian stuffed jalapeño poppers, fresh green salad, and a mango and coconut crisp for dessert.



One Spark Academy student Serena Lee is reflected in a pizza cutter stashed among other cooking utensils in the kitchen of in Thousand Oaks.

