

The Culinary Arts program at California School for the Deaf has gone in a new direction. Students must now pass a food safety test before they can start cooking! Instructor Vernon McNece won't settle for students washing their hands at the beginning of their cooking session; they need to remember to wash their hands between each phase of the cooking process!

For the first few weeks of class, students study food safety and sanitation. They also learn about professionalism and becoming a good employee—all skills that will transfer over to a job in the food industry.

Once they have mastered this material, students take the ServSafe test to get their official California food handler certification. Vernon has the students prepare for the test by watching a captioned video. Students first take the test online to become familiar with it. After that, they take the test a second time with their teacher, Vernon, signing the questions. This time, the students usually pass. After all of the students get their certification, it is time to learn to cook.

The first semester is all about technique and foundation—recognizing and learning to cook the various cuts of meat, as well as learning how to cut chicken and how to cook pork. Each week, they tackle a new food item, such as learning how to make soup stock, proper salad preparation technique, and how to cook grains.

The second semester, students build on what they have learned. They learn the art of multi-tasking by cooking several components of the meal at the same time including meat, vegetables, and starch.

Students who stay with the class for the full two years develop a solid foundation and understanding of culinary practices and are ready to go on to learn specialty skills like catering.