

## Extension programs enrich youth across Johnson County

Youth Development takes a variety of forms throughout Johnson County K-State Research and Extension. In addition to our 4-H Clubs, agents in our unit utilize their strengths, skillsets, and resources to deliver programming that positively impacts youth in urban and suburban settings. Meeting those we serve where they are is essential, whether that be in the classroom, kitchen or in our local parks. We collaborate as a team and with community partners to reach youth in new and exciting ways, always looking for opportunities to provide knowledge for life.



### Bringing Nature to Kids

For more than two years, children ages 8 to 11 have learned about the wonders of nature through Junior Master Naturalist (JEMN), a program of Johnson County K-State Research and Extension and Extension Master Naturalist volunteers. Class topics range from water quality to pollinators. Participants get hands-on learning opportunities that encourage them to explore deeper topics within the realm of

**“Can I join the class? This is some cool stuff you all are doing!”**

— Parent of a Junior Extension Master Naturalist participant



*The most popular field trips included capturing macro-invertebrates at Mill Creek Streamway Park and searching for reptiles and amphibians at Prairie Center.*

natural resources.

For certain classes, students get to see and touch live animals such as snakes and turtles.

This past year, the JEMN classes were offered twice a month, plus a monthly field trip at various parks and natural areas throughout the county. Students learned about mammals, birds, and other wildlife. The children and their parents also learned how to utilize different natural and recreational areas available to them in Johnson County.

Discussion is happening to expand the program into schools through a partnership with the Johnson County Park and Recreation District’s *Out-of-School-Time* programs, which would

increase the number of children who learn about natural resource topics concerning our county.

### Three Decades of Elementary School Enrichment

Thirty-four years ago, Nancy Carr and the 4-H Extension Agent at the time started Johnson County K-State Research and Extension’s school enrichment program to supplement elementary classroom curriculum. Teachers in Johnson County can check out the enrichment kits to use with their students. The two most popular are Chicken Embryology and Butterfly Garden.

“The excitement with the baby



Left: School Enrichment Coordinator Nancy Carr teaches students about caterpillars. Right: Students at Brookridge Elementary School admire baby chicks.

chicks is contagious for the whole school,” says Laura Ostertag, who teaches third grade at Havencroft Elementary School. “My students always include hatching chicks as a highlight in their end of year stories.”

Libby McFarland, 4-6 grade teacher at Global Montessori Academy, says her students loved the Forestry kit and wanted to use it for science journaling. She used the kit to prepare for a field trip to Powell Gardens. In a previous year, one student was motivated by the Butterfly Garden kit to research and document an impressive journal with detailed artwork.

Nancy’s decades-long partnerships with Johnson County educators have made meaningful and memorable impacts on students’ learning.



Traildridge Middle School students prepare many types of food during the after-school cooking club.

and services. It is through this Wellness Hub that Advent Health and Johnson County K-State Research and Extension were brought together, and a wonderful partnership was formed.

At the beginning of 2023, the two organizations began discussing the implementation of an after-school cooking club at Traildridge Middle School. Advent Health’s community health needs assessment had identified nutrition and healthy eating as a priority in the community, and working with schools would increase access to healthy fruits and vegetables in low-income neighborhoods.

The pilot launched with 18 students during the spring 2023 semester. Participants prepared recipes, sampled new foods, and learned about nutrition and food safety. The success of the pilot led to another group for the fall 2023 semester. This group met two additional weeks than the pilot as we identified that the students would benefit from having two additional weeks of activities and learning.

“Through our partnership with Johnson County Extension, the students are exposed to others who are passionate about cooking and eating healthy,” says Jeanette Metzler, Manager for Community Benefit at AdventHealth.

Johnson County Extension looks forward to our continued partnership with AdventHealth to make an impact and serve the youth in our communities.



**School enrichment reach  
January to October 2023:**

**4,562** students and teachers

### After-school club promotes nutrition and cooking skills as community priorities

In 2022, the City of Shawnee received a grant from the National Recreation and Park Association to make their community healthier. They created the “Healthier Because We Live Here Community Wellness Hub” to connect community members to essential programs



**Traildridge Middle School  
pilot class survey results:**

**46%** are eating more fruits and vegetables

**37%** have prepared recipes they learned at home with their families

Learn more about our youth development programs!

**johnson.k-state.edu**



Johnson County



In partnership together