

Hello to our friends and partners across the state! It is the beginning of Nutrition Awareness Month, and Healthy Kids Healthy Communities (HKHC) coordinators have been busy working with their partners to prep gardens, honor food-service workers, launch basketball programs, create a county proclamation, post healthy eating tips on Facebook, teach healthy snack preparation, and much more!

We are happy to report another successful BMI surveillance season behind us! We collected BMI measurements in about 50 schools this past fall thanks to our wonderful HKHC coordinators & partners in elementary schools and nursing and health science programs as well as former school nurses, Healthy Schools grant coordinator Licia Hillman, and Debbie Gentry with the Department of Health in Portales.

We couldn't collect these important data without the help of Becky Joyce, who coordinated measurement of more than 6,100 kindergarteners and third graders – no small feat! We appreciate the nursing programs who support our work as well from staff who coordinate scheduling to the nursing students who diligently follow our standardized measuring protocol.



Our partnerships enable us to identify at-risk populations, track data trends, and establish programs to increase children's access to healthy foods and physical activity.

We are grateful for you!

Thank you to the following nursing programs & health science programs:

Allied Health Nursing in Alamogordo
CNM Rio Rancho
Doña Ana Community College
Santa Fe Community College

Clovis High School
Deming High School
San Juan Community College
UNM Gallup

And a big thank you to all the elementary schools that participated in BMI surveillance. We are grateful for your participation and support.

News & Events

We are super excited to announce a **new partnership with the Public Education Department** to train school food providers on scratch cooking, NM grown products and food waste. We are planning 18 trainings in HKHC school districts over the next two years! Stay tuned for more details coming soon.

Our Healthy Kids Healthy Preschool team is launching the **Family 5.2.1.O Challenge** this month. Forty-nine preschool centers participated in 2023 with 2,500 kids reached! We have 20 additional centers participating this year. The challenge encourages families to do the following daily activities: eat five servings of fruits and vegetables, limit screen time to two hours, be physically active for at least one hour and drink plenty of water.



Watch your email for the **NM Grown application** that is coming soon!

Upcoming Stories:

- Farm to Preschool program in Socorro
- Staffing & coordinator announcements
- Healthy Kids Grant County bike club
- Senior center nutrition



Food Systems

Expanding access to healthy, affordable food in schools and communities



Curry County Students Connect to Agricultural Roots

In rural eastern New Mexico, students are planning gardening projects and connecting to the agricultural history of their hometowns in Curry County, where people drive 25 miles to the closest convenience store.

Students have been involved in all aspects of building a greenhouse (See picture below.) to grow vegetables and herbs for their school in Grady. About 180 kids from preschool to 12th grade attend the same school, many driving from Clovis 35 miles to the south, where families don't farm as much these days.

“A lot of this is new to them,” said Estevan Garcia, Grady’s AG teacher and Future Farmers of America (FFA) advisor. “We want to get some of the young ones out there playing in the dirt so they get that love of growing things early on.”

Wind shredded the school’s small hoophouse a few years ago, so they are trying a greenhouse that Garcia hopes will be productive and creative, offering students a chance to try growing different foods. “It’s definitely a need for our community,” he said.

Melrose, home to 612 people in 2020, has similar needs. Science teacher Alan Daugherty has watched farming decline from half of families to one in five, but he’s also noticing a rising interest in self-sustainable agriculture and locally grown produce.



Thank you, community partners!

- Curry County Health Council
- Curry County
- Grady Schools
- Healthy Kids Curry County
- Local farmers
- Melrose Schools
- Melrose Senior Center
- Village of Melrose

“That’s something that I think will be a driving force in making sure gardening will be beneficial to our students for years to come,” said Daugherty.

He is tapping into the older generation to advise students on plant varieties and gardening techniques. “Gardening is a big component of some of our seniors’ lives, and I hope to take some of their enthusiasm and knowledge to help foster activities students are doing,” he said. Healthy Kids Curry County helped Melrose secure a grant for a large greenhouse, where students can grow vegetables and incorporate an aquaculture component. “We can show different kinds of fresh food and tie it into Healthy Kids—teaching kids how to eat well and eat locally grown,” Daugherty said.

His students studied fertilizers, plant life cycles and hydroponic programs. They set up a small hydroponic system – a layered system with plants growing over a fish tank – and experimented with chile and pepper varieties, assessing variables that affect plant growth.

In the long-term, Daugherty hopes to supply fresh produce for school and senior center meals. “This is something that’s getting pushed at the national level – promoting food sustainability, being less dependent upon processed and manufactured food,” he said. “This gives people access to a good supply of healthy food.”



Healthy Fundraising

Supporting school needs and healthy lifestyles



HKHC Helps Schools Have Fun and Raise Funds

Healthy Kids Healthy Communities coordinators are partnering with schools across New Mexico to raise money through healthy and non-food fundraisers – and making plenty of money without selling sweets.

Chaves County's healthy fundraisers have mushroomed as word spread about how much schools could make in one day. Three elementary schools raised a combined total of \$48,000 by hosting Color Runs – a local favorite. Volunteers spray washable colors on students as they run past, earning pledges along the way.

Many schools in Chaves are also using the [Get Movin' website](#), a user friendly online program that allows groups to create customized events and track progress to easily identify individual and classroom winners. Healthy Kids Chaves County Coordinator Becky Joyce reports that parents love it because it's easy and saves time, well worth sharing a small percentage of profit with the website.



Students paid \$3/each to bike around their school's track. "Everyone looks forward to this now," Ortega said.

In Colfax County, HKHC Coordinator Elizabeth Ortega worked with Raton Intermediate School's principal to rework the national Bike to School Day into a bike rally. Students paid \$3 each to bike around their school's track as music played. Volunteers handed out such healthy snacks as watermelon, orange slices and granola bars. The school raised close to \$600.

"Afterwards, you'd see kids all over their neighborhoods biking. That was a good benefit I wasn't anticipating," Ortega said.

Longfellow Elementary joined the fun with a bike parade before a home football game. Kids decorated their bikes and paid \$5 each to ride around the field to the cheers of Raton fans.

Healthy Kids Hidalgo County taps into the community's culture with such fundraisers as goat roping, country dancing & 3-legged boot races.



Classes compete to collect the most pennies. Students can add silver coins to subtract from another class's total. Elida raised \$1,182!

From penny wars to kissing cows, Roosevelt County is taking fundraisers to new creative heights. Schools in Elida and Portales are raising money by offering up their principals for entertainment. Raise a certain amount of funds or collect enough food-pantry donations, and students get to watch their principal kiss a cow, get a pie in the face, or tape their principal to the wall.



"By giving our students a chance to participate in fundraisers and activities like a Color Run, (Healthy Kids) 5.2.1.0 or Roswell Games, they are creating healthy living habits that can last a lifetime. Our school then uses those funds for extracurricular learning activities & resources."

– Valley View Elementary Principal Travis Ackerman



Farm to Preschool Pilot Program

Strategies that increase access to healthy, local foods in NM preschools



Bumble Bee Learning Center Instills Healthy Eating Habits

Farms are scarce on the southern edge of New Mexico, where the city of Sunland Park calls itself the ‘Gateway to the Land of Enchantment.’ In this rural community a few minutes from El Paso and Juárez, preschoolers attending Bumble Bee Learning Center are learning how to garden, trying new fruits and vegetables and bringing home their curiosity and interest in freshly grown food.



Bumble Bee Learning Center is one of eight preschools participating in a pilot Farm to Preschool program funded by the New Mexico Department of Health to instill healthy habits in young children and increase access to locally grown food.

“Teaching young children the value of eating and growing food helps shape lifelong healthy habits,” said Rita Condon, manager of the Obesity, Nutrition & Physical Activity Program, which includes Healthy Kids Healthy Communities.



Each preschool implements a comprehensive, culturally relevant program rooted in four core strategies:

1. Buy NM Grown produce for meals and snacks
2. Grow edible gardens
3. Provide nutrition education
4. Encourage family and community engagement

HKHC awarded additional centers mini grants to implement one of the four strategies. To support centers, technical advisors assist with gardening, local food purchasing, and nutrition education activities.

At Bumble Bee, all 61 students, ages 2 to 12, grew seeds in the classroom as staff built five garden beds to the side of the preschool. With grant funding, they created a fence encircling the garden and bought garden supplies, including kid-friendly tools for harvesting and food preparation.

“The state funding made it possible,” said Bernice Ibarra, Bumble Bee’s director. “It wouldn’t have worked in our budget to pay out-of-pocket for such a big garden.”

Teachers incorporated gardening into their lesson plans with books, videos and conversations about what plants need to grow strong. “So, the kids knew what to do when we started planting day,” Ibarra said. “Seeds started sprouting within days, and every week the preschool class brings their notebooks and documents how much the plant is growing by drawing pictures.”

Bumble Bee invites families to help plant and harvest the garden. Staff sends home nutrition activities as well as garden goodies like cherry tomatoes and basil.

At school, students tried garden produce cooked different ways. They crunched carrots in unison. They transformed zucchini into squash spaghetti with a spiralizer. They cut cucumbers into spears with wooden and plastic knives. They explored pumpkins, comparing sizes and roasting seeds.

Students began requesting and eating more vegetables at the center and at home. “She loved tasting new vegetables and even encouraged us to try it here at home,” wrote Lorenza Dominguez about her 5-year-old daughter. “My kids like to eat asparagus and eggplant because they tried it at daycare,” said parent Mike Gonzales.



Scrubbing vegetables is one way students participate in food



Healthy Schools

Increasing opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity in schools



Healthy Schools Grant to Enhance Nutrition & Physical Activity in Roswell

When Licia Hillman was a principal, she raced her students and did cartwheels to get them moving. Now she's incorporating activity and wellness more broadly as the coordinator of a new five-year Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Healthy Schools grant that builds on the work of the first Healthy Schools grant that concluded in 2023.

The state departments of Health & Education co-wrote the \$1.95 million grant that focuses on strengthening school wellness policies statewide, and improving physical activity, school nutrition, and physical education programs in one priority school district, Roswell.

"I hope that it improves the quality of the school environment for students in Roswell as a model for other schools in New Mexico," said Micayla Duran, the Healthy Schools grant coordinator for the Public Education Department.

Hillman's work seems like a natural extension of Healthy Kids Chaves County's efforts increasing physical activity and healthy eating opportunities for elementary school children. Her first focus was teaching physical education teachers pickleball, badminton and tennis lessons so they could introduce new activities to students – a training so popular other teachers asked to attend.

Hillman has set aside grant funds to provide P.E. teachers with equipment, supplies or training, and has reached out to assess needs. One school asked for support teaching children who have special needs.

Next, Hillman set her sights on quick fill water stations for every Roswell school. One teacher told her: "You can't believe how much water kids are drinking now that it doesn't take so long to fill it."



Gabriel Gaarden of ONAPA joins Healthy Kids Chaves County Coordinator Paula Camp & Healthy Schools Coordinator Licia Hillman for Fun Fit Family Night in Roswell.



P.E. teachers asked for pickleball lessons so they could teach their students a new activity.

Roswell Independent Schools Superintendent Brian Luck said the Healthy Schools grant was the perfect opportunity to expand Roswell's focus on healthy schools. "It helps promote a healthy lifestyle for the kids, and they take that back to their parents and grandparents," he said. "Hopefully it's productive not only for our schools but for our community."

Hillman is looking at ways to connect fourth and fifth-graders to high schoolers who take Continuing Education courses, such as Culinary Arts. It's one way for students to envision a future beyond academic classes and gain job

skills. She also wants to expand the elementary schools' gardens and establish high school sites for growing native plants that can be transplanted to other schools.

"I want things to start and people to say, 'This has to keep going.'" Hillman said. In addition to Roswell's activities, the Healthy Schools grant will also allow the state to hold regional wellness policy trainings and support educational conferences that focus on nutrition services, chronic disease management as well as staff wellness, and physical activity & education.