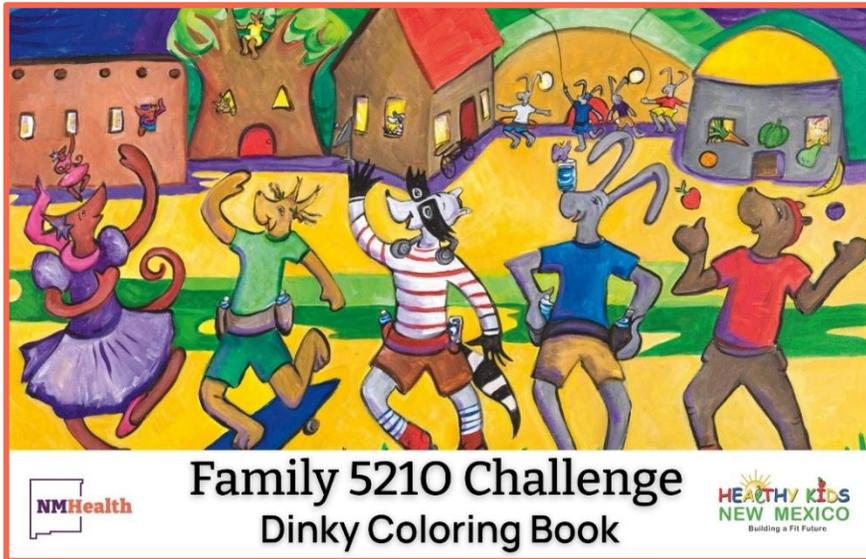


Hello to our wonderful partners and coordinators across the state. Our Obesity, Nutrition and Physical Activity (ONAPA) Program has started strategic planning to guide the program into the future and ensure we are consistently focused on our goal to connect more children and families with opportunities to eat healthy food and safe opportunities to be physically active.



Healthy Kids Healthy Preschool (HKHP) launched the **Family 5.21.0 Challenge** this month in 19 preschools serving 760 students, including two centers in our Healthy Kids Roosevelt and San Juan counties. During the 4-week program, families spend one week focusing on each activity: 5 or more servings of fruit and vegetables, no more than 2 hours of screen time, 1 hour of physical activity, and drinking water instead of sugary drinks.

Three cheers to Health Educator Nicki Perez, and our HKHP coordinators, Alberto Zavala and Michelle Chavez, for planning and distributing supplies. This year, Nicki created a coloring pad (above), a new incentive children receive for completing the challenge.

We are recruiting for a coordinator in Colfax County after Elizabeth Ortega decided to focus on her growing business, Hammer Forged Athletics. We love Elizabeth's ideas, creativity and energy, and we know she'll continue to do great things in Raton.

## News & Events

ONAPA welcomed Deborah Busemeyer as the new **Healthy Kids Healthy Communities (HKHC) Program Manager**.

Deborah is happy to work more closely with coordinators & partners after serving as ONAPA's communications consultant for more than a dozen years. Her favorite physical activities are yoga and dancing as well as hiking/backpacking with her family.



We are pleased to add **Laurie Collins** to Healthy Kids Roosevelt County's coordinator team. Laurie raised five



children in Portales and has worked at the local Health Council for the past four years. She is excited to join HKHC.

In other coordinator news, we are finalizing a contract with the **National Center for Frontier Communities** to continue our work in Healthy Kids Hidalgo County and later expand to Healthy Kids Luna County.

## Upcoming Stories

- Healthy Kids San Juan County
- Nutrition Month
- Healthy schools



# BMI Surveillance

Collecting data to monitor trends & target resources



## Volunteers Help HKHC Collect Data Across the State

The fall season sends ONAPA trekking across New Mexico to assist coordinators in collecting the heights and weights of kindergarteners and third graders. Healthy Kids Chaves County Coordinator Becky Joyce heads the project, scheduling volunteers and time with schools randomly selected – 71 in 15 counties this year. ONAPA's Epidemiologist Alex Hickmott ensures accuracy, analyzes the data and creates the Department of Health's annual childhood obesity report.

ONAPA established its BMI Surveillance program 15 years ago because the state of New Mexico had no information about weight among elementary-school students.

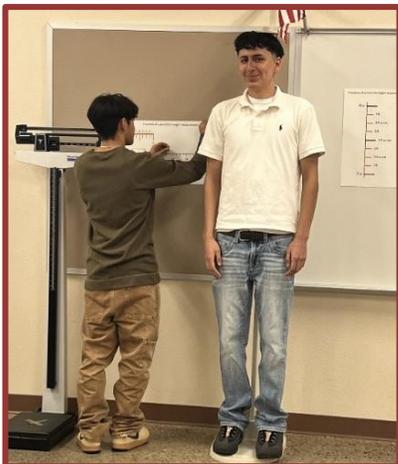
"Collecting data helps us monitor trends, identify at-risk populations, and guide efforts to increase children's access

to healthy foods and physical activity," said Rita Condon, ONAPA's Director. "We also inform legislators and state leaders, so they understand the importance of investing in our obesity-prevention work."

HKHC coordinators meet with schools to discuss their confidential BMI report and ways to support a healthier student population. They help schools implement such programs as active fundraisers, walking programs, and gardens.



*We so appreciate all the nursing and high school students who help us measure elementary-school kids as they gain practical experience. Above and left, Clovis H.S. students in the HOSA program (Health Occupations Students of America).*



### *Thank you, partners!*

Central NM Rio Rancho nursing students

Clovis H.S. HOSA students

Deming H.S. HOSA students

Doña Ana Community College Nursing Program

San Juan College Nursing Program

Santa Fe Community College Nursing Program

UNM-Gallup Nursing Program

School staff in Chaves, Curry, Doña Ana, Eddy, Grant, Guadalupe, Lea, Luna, McKinley, Otero, Roosevelt, San Juan, Sandoval, Santa Fe and Taos counties

Volunteers Laurie Collins, Licia Hillman & Alberto Zavala

Clovis Municipal Schools measures students in all their schools

every year "to identify student health trends across the district, helping us strategically allocate resources and implement initiatives that support a healthier student population and community," said Krystal Gutierrez, Clovis' Director of Health & Related Services.

One of the initiatives Clovis implemented is a youth sports program that ensures all students can participate on a team at no cost, allowing them to remain physically active while learning the value of being on a team, she said.

***"We measure BMI as a key component of our health and wellness program."***  
– Krystal Gutierrez, BSN, RN, NCSN



# Healthy Schools



## Dexter Connects Students to Local Food & Fun Movement

Food Service Director Shelley Montgomery has served students in Dexter Consolidated Schools fresh fruit and vegetables long enough to see the difference: Kids who used to be reluctant veggie eaters now ask for baby carrots or the cherry tomatoes that grow in a tractor tire outside of her office. They sample snow peas and bell peppers – and want more.

“If we do a taste testing for something, the next time they go to the grocery store with their parents, they are going to ask for it,” Shelley said. “That’s a start for kids to naturally eat healthier, and they don’t even realize it’s been a change.”

Shelley’s comment reflects our mission in HKHC: Instill healthy habits early to create lifelong healthy choices. Dexter Elementary staff and school partners are focused on that mission, offering a variety of wholesome food options and creating additional opportunities for students to be physically active.

This school year, Shelley is excited to see what students will grow in the district’s new greenhouse with the support of the high school and middle school agriculture teachers, Skyler Pierce and Rhonda Martinez.

Dexter Elementary’s new principal, Crystal Jaramillo, wants to connect students’ understanding of locally grown food with their community of dairies, ranches and farms. “It’s important for kids to see what their community is doing and how the farms give back to so many,” she said.

One of Healthy Kids Chaves County’s coordinators, Becky Joyce, is talking with Crystal about starting a Walking Wednesday program with families there.



*Above, a Dexter student helps garden in a tractor tire that High School Ag Teacher Skyler Pierce donated. Dexter Schools Maintenance crew carved out the opening deeper and hooked up a water hose nearby.*



*Dexter Schools buys corn and other produce from Graves Farm, which is located so close that veggies are delivered still warm from the sun.*

The program would complement the school’s special physical activities like Turkey Trot, dance parties and Color Run, a program Becky and Paula Camp helped establish in Roswell schools to raise funds while enjoying physical activity.

“We try to make sure we get our exercise and keep fun at the forefront,” said Dexter Elementary P.E. Coach Jacob Alfaro. “I think it helps to show the kids the importance of being physically active. I tell them that it’s important to get your heartbeat up, and you can do that at recess and at home. Throwing bonus activity events reiterates that point.”



*Dexter Elementary invited families to its first Turkey Trot, which was moved to the gym due to weather. P.E. Coach Jacob Alfaro quickly created an obstacle course and fun running games as the school cheered on participants.*



# Golden Chile Awards



Celebrating efforts connecting NM schools, preschools & senior centers to local food

It was a festive evening of honor and celebration at the fifth annual Golden Chile Awards this past December with over 250 attendees and a record number of awardees. The New Mexico Grown Coalition, a network of public institutions, community-based organizations, and individuals, established the awards program to recognize everyone's work in NM Grown programming.

This year, the Coalition honored 92 schools, senior centers, early childhood programs, farmers, ranchers, and food hubs for establishing school gardens, buying or distributing locally grown food, and providing nutrition education, taste testing and family/community engagement.

"We have the best time celebrating the nutrition providers and growers who work hard all year to feed students and seniors healthy, local food," said Rita Condon, ONAPA's Director.

Golden Chile speakers included New Mexico Senator Liz Stefanics, Shaunna Smith of Portales Schools, and Jeremy and Selece Gathings of Gathings Gardens in Bloomfield.

The Golden Chile Awards kicked off three days of learning and sharing at the 10th National Farm to Cafeteria Conference that drew nearly 1,300 changemakers to Albuquerque.



Shaunna Smith, Portales Municipal Schools' Food Service Director in Healthy Kids Roosevelt County, earned the Golden Chile Award in 2025 for her district's investment in NM Grown programming. Rita Condon of ONAPA (left) and Alena Paisano of the New Mexico Farmers' Market Association (right) recognized awardees.



Left, Cobre Consolidated Schools Interim Superintendent Randall Piper stands between the Cobre Food Service Team: Director Alma Grijalva (right) and Samantha Grijalva earned the Blossom award this year in Healthy Kids Grant County. Center, Gabriel Gaarden of ONAPA served as the evening's MC. Right, Bloomfield School District in Healthy Kids San Juan County earned a Blossom under the direction of Student Nutrition Manager Joanne Rodriguez.



# New Mexico Grown



## The Veggie Shack Supplies Freshly Grown Food in Roosevelt County

Margie Plummer grew up on a farm in Bethel, a ranching and farming community between Portales and Floyd in the plains of eastern New Mexico. She learned about growing vegetables when her husband convinced her to grow produce for the Clovis Farmers' Market in 1992. Today, she's built a market around selling to institutions, starting before NM Grown was a program and expanding over the years into senior and early child care centers, the local food bank, and six local schools.

Margie helped start the Portales Farmers' Market three years after her entrance into vegetable farming. She's managed Portales and Clovis markets for more than 20 years and operated the Veggie Shack for close to 20. That's where you can buy her fresh watermelons – a local favorite of school students – and a variety of seasonal produce she grows on 30 acres with her business partner, Mark Balko. She

*Margie works very hard supplying Roosevelt County with fresh, healthy food. She is an invaluable community partner.*  
– Caron Powers, Healthy Kids Roosevelt County Coordinator

sells produce to the schools in Floyd, Elida, Portales, Grady, Melrose, and Logan.

“We’re helping out other people, and it’s helping us because we’re doing what we love,” she said. “Farming is in your blood. You don’t quit. Every year is different. We’re still experimenting.”

Margie notices that the region, like so many in New Mexico, has lost generations of knowledge about how food grows, so she

recognizes the importance of supplying the small communities that surround her. She said state funding for Senior Nutrition is critical in helping seniors be able to buy her fresh food at the farmers' markets.



*In addition to her farming business and the Veggie Shack store, Margie retired from Portales Schools after 29 years as a bookkeeper and is on her 21<sup>st</sup> year as business manager at Floyd Municipal Schools.*

“It really helps seniors out because they don’t get a lot of fresh veggies, and it helps small farmers,” she said.

Margie could grow more veggies but can’t find reliable, consistent workers for harvesting. Her adult daughter and the older grandchildren – she has five ages 2 to 24 – grew up in the fields and helped sell at the markets, but they have moved on to other interests. Mark and Margie do almost everything on their own, learning to plant vegetables that need less attention as they get older.

“It’s ours and we want to see it work,” she said. “It’s fun, and a challenge to see what we can do.”



*Margie Plummer sells produce at her Veggie Shack. Popular items include okra, melons, green beans, and green chile.*



# Healthy Communities on Tour



Visiting and Connecting in HKHC Communities

## Guadalupe Champions Help HKHC Expand Healthy Opportunities

Rita Condon and Deborah Busemeyer, program managers for ONAPA and HKHC, recently visited Healthy Kids Guadalupe County to meet some dreamers and doers who are serving kids the healthiest food and establishing new recreation options in the northeastern community about 40 miles between Las Vegas and Moriarty.

Our first stop was to meet up with a local mountain bike rider, Eli Quinn, who has created a plan for a mountain bike park near Perch Lake that would rival national bike courses. He is dreaming big, and has worked with the city of Santa Rosa to secure a \$1.5 million grant for a community pump park.

Healthy Kids Guadalupe County Coordinator Nicole Duran is working with him to create a bike club to teach kids basic biking and maintenance skills while they also organize folks to develop a bike-pedestrian master plan, an essential step to be eligible for federal funds.

Nicole is calling on her connections – including teens required to do community service and high school interns – to promote Santa Rosa’s new pump park and help Eli lead the bike club. She’s also organizing a community clean-up of weeds and trash in the basketball court at La Loma Park, an easy task that makes the court more accessible and reminds the community of their local asset.



*Anton Chico Elementary cooks, Fermin and Mona, specialize in freshly-made goodies, like the big pot of salsa they are standing behind. They have served scratch-cooked items, including breads and tortillas, long before it was required.*

At Anton Chico Elementary, we loved sampling freshly made salsa and meeting the hard-working food-service duo there and in Santa Rosa. Santa Rosa’s Food Service Director Jennifer Velasquez was scrubbing trays with her teammate, Joy Inells, when we arrived.

Jen estimates 80 percent of her menu is scratch-cooked with favorites like zucchini cake and red chile burritos. They also introduce new items from dragon fruit to eggplant, and include veggies from their garden when possible. We were impressed that salads are the hot new item sold in their concession stand.

Nicole will recruit, train and organize volunteers to engage students during Nuevo Thursdays and build garden beds at Santa Rosa Elementary.

Next, we head to Healthy Kids San Juan County in March followed by Grant-Hidalgo-Luna counties in April. We are excited to spend time with coordinators, meet partners and see your work.

*“When we visit our communities, we can help develop partnerships, understand the challenges and strengths of each community, and enrich our connections with one another.”*

– Rita Condon, ONAPA Program Manager



*Kids are enjoying Santa Rosa’s new pump park.*