HEALTHY KIDS, HEALTHY SCHOOLS
GRANT PROGRAM

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

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Executive Summary

In September 2014, Governor Jay Inslee launched the Healthiest Next Generation Initiative in collaboration with stakeholders to lay the groundwork for a healthy, active generation. In order to help Washington’s children enjoy active lives and eat well, several grants, policies, programs, and projects were implemented across Washington State that created healthy early learning settings, schools and communities. The Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools Grant, championed by Rep. Marcus Riccelli and supported by the Healthiest Next Generation Initiative, offers funding for capital school site improvements for healthy eating and active living, including access to water bottle filling stations. Based on the high demand and success of the first two rounds of grants in 2015 and 2017, the legislature appropriated $3.25 million in the 2019-2021 capital budget for continuation of the Health Kids, Healthy Schools grants. Districts could request anywhere between $2,500 to $200,000.

In the third grant cycle, which closed in the fall of 2019, thirty-one Washington schools across the state received grant money after a total of $8.1 million in application requests were submitted.

Interviews were conducted with grant recipient contacts to better understand the issues addressed by the grant and the impacts and consequences of the grant-funded projects. Grant recipients varied widely in demographics, location, need, and projects, but all are taking action to build a healthy future for their students. Through these interviews, we found that Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools grants have helped foster healthy environments for not only students but the community at-large. We also found these grant-funded projects to be useful for the current escalated needs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to be useful into future. However, it is important to remember that promoting health is more than just getting kids active and providing nutritious meals. True health requires cultivating an environment of self-efficacy, safety, community, and joy. Through these grant recipients’ stories, we can see that these grants have achieved just that. Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools has helped foster environments where children have a reliable and consistent source for food at school and a safe place to play outside. Environments that promote creativity and curiosity around food and activity. Environments where communities can learn and grow together. Most importantly, environments where children’s needs are met so they can focus on playing, learning, and reaching their full potential.
Nestled by the mouth of the Columbia River sits the Wahkiakum School District. The small, rural county is abundant with lush forests and plentiful wildlife but is burdened by food insecurity. The Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools grant has been integral in the district’s efforts to provide plentiful produce grown on-site, increasing student access to healthy, delicious meals. Their first Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools grant awarded during the 2015-2017 cycle allowed them to restore their greenhouse and start an experimental agriculture class for their students. According to Superintendent Brent Freeman, that was just the beginning. From there, they decided they would create a garden. They have tripled the size of their growing capacity, creating a veritable wonderland for their students that includes an apple orchard, a blueberry orchard, a learning garden, pumpkin patches, and a pavilion for selling their produce, whose profits feed back into the garden. Freeman explained how students are able to pick fruit off of trees whenever they are hungry. Their second Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools grant, awarded during the 2019-2021 cycle, braided with another funding source, will allow them to turn their produce into meals for students. “This grant will go towards purchasing equipment for the commercial kitchen we’re building, so as our garden expands, we’ll have the ability to produce food for our students,” explained Freeman. Once the kitchen is up and running, the district plans to create fresh, healthy meals on-site for their students from homegrown produce. They also plan on offering culinary and fermentation classes for the student body using their produce. Utilizing the large retired population in the area, Wahkiakum School District’s newly renovated greenhouse and commercial kitchen. The greenhouse contains 1400 square feet of growing beds and contributed to 2019’s summer food program. The commercial kitchen will be used for food processing, food science, and culinary science classes.
District will have local community members teach these classes through the district’s mentorship program. The Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools grants have helped turn these schools into something more: a place to explore nature, a place of community, and a place of hope.

**Freeman School District**

Just south of Spokane sits the small, rural Freeman School District. Prior to the Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools grant, the district relied on an old freezer; a hand me down at the time of its installation in 1989. The freezer contained three backup cooling mechanisms. If one of the cooling mechanisms failed, the next backup mechanism would kick in to keep food cold. However, all three backup cooling mechanisms had failed, leaving the district with a high-risk freezer that could break down at any moment. With the support of the Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools grant, they have been able to install a brand-new freezer. By avoiding their freezer breaking down, Freeman School District can continue to store food at a safe temperature. According to the Nutrition Services Director Ellen Arguinchona, the freezer also allows them to continue storing commodities, thereby offsetting food cost, and assuring they are able to afford high quality, healthy ingredients for their students’ meals.

Freeman School District’s new freezer has also proven useful during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to school closures, the district has begun breakfast and lunch meal delivery to students’ homes. Arguinchona says “it’s helped us keep things in stock since we’re now doing pre-packaged meals instead of offer vs serve... the mass of food is quite a bit larger, so having that storage space to rely on has been great. I’m really glad we got it fixed before school closures started.”

*Freeman Nutrition Services Staff ready to send out meals during COVID-19 shelter in place with help from their new freezer.*
Grapeview School District

On scenic Case Inlet, Grapeview is a quiet community, home to the Grapeview School District. Funding from the Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools grant has allowed the kindergarten through fifth grade school to install a brand-new water bottle filling station. The water bottle filling station has proven to be a hit, notably increasing student and faculty water consumption. Many parents are taking the opportunity to engage in the effort to keep their children healthy and hydrated by providing their students with their own personal water bottle, making hydration something to get excited about. The school also believes the water bottle filling station is a much more sanitary option than water fountains. In fact, the filling station was such a success, the district plans on applying for funding next cycle so they can install a water bottle filling station on the sixth through eighth grade campus.

Napavine School District

South of Olympia along I-5, Napavine School District has a goal of getting its students outdoors. With only one covered play structure and the district’s elementary gym used for the seventh through eighth grade PE class, the kindergarten through sixth grade students currently have to use the dining auditorium for recess. Geoff Parks, Napavine’s superintendent, hopes to renovate the current play structure. “We only have one covered space and the concrete is slick and the basketball baskets are old,” he explained. They also plan on adding another covered structure to increase utilization of their available space. With these two renovations, they intend on increasing the students’ ability to play outside even when it’s raining. The district hopes increasing outdoor time will encourage greater levels of physical activity during recess, allowing students to get their energy out and thereby increasing focus and participation in the classroom. Parks also noted the importance of the Healthy Kids, Healthy School Grant for districts like Napavine. “I’m thankful for the grant opportunity, especially for small rural districts like ours that just don’t have the ability to earmark a little bit of money to do school improvement projects like this.”
Union Gap School

Union Gap School is no stranger to the Healthy Kids, Healthy School grant program. With money provided from the grant during the 2015-2017 cycle, they were able to install a dedicated water bottle filling station, replacing busy classroom sinks. In an effort to continue chipping away at their vision for the district, they applied and were awarded another round of funding, this time around for new kitchen and playground equipment. Union Gap School was also awarded a fresh fruit and vegetable program grant, allowing them to provide fresh produce every day for their students. However, even with this grant, their ability to prepare healthy, from-scratch meals was hindered by their old and inefficient kitchen equipment. The dishwasher leaked constantly and the ovens were not reliable. “Our kitchen staff love to do scratch baking but they had to do it in batches because our mixer is so small, so there were menu items we just couldn’t make” Superintendent Lisa Gredvig explained. With the kitchen renovations made possible by the Healthy Kids, Healthy School grant, Union Gap School will finally be able to create produce-centric homemade meals with ease.

In line with their goal of creating a healthy environment for their students and the community at large, Union Gap is also expanding their playground. Prior to the grant, there was only one swing set and volleyball net. Students would have to wait in line to use the equipment instead of running and playing freely during recess. Expanding the playground will benefit both the students and the community. Families frequent the school’s field, basketball court, and playground on the weekends as it is one of the few recreational spaces in the area, making it a hub in the community. Once the playground is renovated and expanded, not only will students be free to play, but the community will have more space to stay active, happy, and healthy.

Mabton School District

In rural Eastern Washington, Mabton School District sits along the Yakima River. With support from the Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools grant, Mabton Junior Senior High School was able to purchase new weight room equipment with the goal of providing proper strength training for their student athletes and implementing good lifestyle habits in their general student body. Caleb Oten,
Director of Teaching and Learning, explained how the older and sparse equipment previously available reduced motivation in students. Healthy Kids, Healthy schools funding also helped Mabton elementary address another issue. Due to old pipes, the taste of the water in the schools’ drinking fountains discouraged hydration among the student body. With funding from the grant, they were able to install new water bottle filling stations. The students responded as the district hoped and are happy to report that water consumption has increased significantly since their implementation. If anything, the water bottle filling stations have been too successful. “Excitement around them has presented a new problem because kids want water now during class. Sure, it’s a disruption, but they are more hydrated,” says Oten.

**Nooksack Valley School District**

On the border of Washington and Canada lies the rapidly growing Nooksack Valley School District. Amidst the struggle to grow the school district to accommodate the influx of elementary age students, both elementary schools have been trying to work with old kitchen equipment installed almost thirty years ago. They’re dishwasher had trouble reaching the necessary temperature for sanitation and the oven didn’t cook food evenly, requiring excess staff time to tend to the food while roasting. With the Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools funding, Nooksack Valley School District has been able to purchase ovens, a cooler, a dishwasher, and a cold bar for their elementary schools. Food Service Director Melissa Paulus is hoping the new cold bar and ovens will allow them to offer a wider variety of fruits and vegetables for the students. The cold bar will offer more space for produce offerings and the ovens will free up staff time to focus on more labor-intensive recipes such as salads and cut up fruits and veggies. “We do a harvest of the month where we focus on a certain vegetable grown in our area and so we would do this sheet pan vegetable roast...it was really difficult with these ovens so in the last year we did not do that, so that will be a real benefit, to be able to do more hot

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*A beautiful kale apple salad prepared for Nooksack Valley School District students. With new equipment, dishes like this will be offered more frequently.*
vegetables,” explained Paulus. With the help of the grant, Nooksack Valley students will be exposed to a variety of produce, setting them up for a future of good health.

**Lake Quinault School**

On the Olympic peninsula, Lake Quinault school sits alongside its namesake lake. It’s a small, rural school with 190 students and 40 miles between them and the nearest grocery store. With a small student body, it’s been hard to find the funding they need to provide a productive, safe space for students to stay physically active. The Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools grant supplied the opportunity they needed to revamp their gym floor, provide new equipment for their gym, and create a playground for its younger students. The gym floor had last been installed in 1991, leaving dead spots and splitting boards for the current students. Weight room equipment was breaking, weights were rusting, and benches were split, leaving a dangerous and unhealthy environment for the football and volleyball teams, as well as the student body and faculty who used the gym. Since installing the new gym floor, there has been an upswell of positive response in both current students and alumni. Not only has the project helped create a healthier atmosphere at the school, but it has brought the community together, united by a sense of pride brought on by the renovations. As Principal Keith Samplawski explained, teachers worked side by side, volunteering to put equipment together and paint the weight room. Everyday Mr. Samplawski receives requests from alumni to come use the weight room. “We’ll always be open for any community member who wants to use our gym,” said Samplawski.

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