

Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Success Story

Healthy Food Accessibility through Community Partnerships



Background

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) partnered with Glendale Unified School District (GUSD) to implement a variety of strategies, which includes conducting nutrition education to students and families through a partnership with Adventist Health Glendale Foundation (AHGL), increasing healthy food access by implementing expanded/mobile produce distributions through a partnership with Seeds of Hope, implementing the Smarter Lunchroom Movement, engaging youth to mobilize installing hydration stations, implementing share tables to redistribute surplus food, and improving physical activity in afterschool settings through implementation of CATCH Kids Club. GUSD is a public-school district that serves 25,000 students in preschool through 12th grade and has 32 school sites primarily in Glendale, California. Students come from a wide range of ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and speak 35 different languages; over 50% of GUSD students qualify for free and reduced-price meals.

Body

THE NEED: Challenge

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the GUSD CalFresh Healthy Living (CFHL) Team set out to meet the needs of school families by increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables through access to healthy food events. The CFHL Team partnered with five school sites with the highest percentage of free and reduced-price meal participation in the district to host these events, which have continued to take place over the last two school years.

THE WORK: Solution

Through a DPH-facilitated partnership with Seeds of Hope, GUSD held 20 access to healthy food events in the 2022-2023 school year. Events were scheduled to take place during

staggered dismissal times to make it easy and convenient for as many families as possible to attend. In addition, they were held in front of the school and set-up to replicate the feel of a farmers' market to make them fun, festive, and inviting. GUSD also worked with school administration to help promote events through multiple channels, including school websites, physical flyers in school front offices, and signage outside of schools. School Principals also included reminders about upcoming events during their weekly calls to families.

Instead of pre-bagging produce for families to take home, GUSD transitioned to a hybrid farmers market and client choice distribution model. This allowed community members to select which items they wanted to take home, improving client satisfaction and reducing food waste.

Through the support of School Site Champion Parents, Teachers, and other volunteer school community members with produce gleaning, GUSD was able to increase the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables requested from Seeds of Hope to meet community demand. The GUSD team also partnered with teachers to engage students in supporting events by decorating produce bags and helping prepare for events during the school day.

Finally, GUSD's continued partnership with Adventist Health Glendale (AHGL) allowed for the integration of healthy taste tests and other nutrition education activities at events.

THE IMPACT: Results

Throughout the 2022-2023 school year, GUSD distributed 54,325 pounds of produce to school community members. On average, 250 families attended each event, and an estimated 20,499 individuals were reached. A total of 26 volunteers supported the events throughout the school year.

AHGL conducted 16 taste tests, distributing a total of 1,625 healthy food and beverage samples and corresponding recipes to families. These activities enhanced the events and helped to build connections between all the CalFresh Healthy Living activities happening at each school site.

Seeds of Hope provided a variety of produce throughout the year, including items such as cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplants, papayas, mangoes, and Korean melons.

At each event, a comment box was set out on the CalFresh Resource Table to collect feedback from community members about how GUSD could improve their events. The team collected 57 responses in English and Spanish. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many notes of gratitude. At this table, community members could also receive healthy cookbooks, recipe cards, and information about CalFresh Food benefits.

Sustaining Success:

The GUSD CFHL Team will continue to partner with Seeds of Hope to provide access to healthy food events during the 2023-2024 school year. GUSD will also be providing these events at an additional school site.

The district received a 5-year Community Schools Implementation Grant from the California Department of Education that has allowed the CFHL elementary school sites to hire additional

teacher specialists. These individuals will be supporting CFHL activities, including promoting events, nutrition education classes, and family engagement. The impacts of this initiative will be sustained through these continued partnerships and the buy-in and support from the school community.

Favorite Quote

“Our family is always grateful to have such a great resources and the team is wonderful!”

- Parent, Horace Mann Elementary School

“This is a great program for our families!! Thank you :)”

- Parent, Marshall Elementary School

“Gracias por ayudar con comida. A las personas que lo necesitamos.”

- Parent, Roosevelt Middle School

Photograph





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