



Healthy Kids **Healthy Communities**

BUILDING HEALTHIER TOMORROWS

Healthy Kids Curry County

In Clovis, more than half of the elementary-school students participated in a challenge to improve their nutrition and be more active. Schools are developing edible gardens. Eleven of twelve elementary schools have salad bars, and all twelve have school yards that are open for community use outside of school hours.

The programs are changing children's attitudes toward healthy foods and the food their families buy in the grocery stores. Mitch Gray, coordinator of the Healthy Kids Healthy Curry County Initiative, sees kids who sample fruit at their school later buy that fruit with their parents at the store.

Making it easier for people to choose healthy food and active lifestyles is the goal of Healthy Kids Healthy Curry County. The initiative, supported by Healthy Kids New Mexico, is making changes where children live, learn and play. The idea is that families will follow their children in establishing healthy habits.

Located on the eastern border of New Mexico and Texas, Clovis is a friendly, rural town of 39,000 where people commonly call one another ma'am and sir. It's situated in a triangle with Lubbock and Amarillo, Texas, the nearest big cities that are more than 90 miles away.

Activity hasn't been a major focus for the community so Gray is the most excited about Healthy Kids Healthy Curry County's partnership with the City's Park and Recreation

Key Community Successes

October 2011 - June 2013

- All 12 Clovis Municipal Schools (CMS) elementary schoolyards are opened for community use outside of school hours; made infrastructure changes at Barry and Mesa Elementary Schools and posted welcoming signage at Mesa Elementary
- 6 CMS elementary schools and 1,912 K-6 students participated in the 5.2.1.O Challenge this past year
- Installed salad bars in 11 of 12 elementary schools
- Established edible garden at Barry Elementary
- Conducted fruit and vegetable tastings in 6 CMS elementary schools
- Established partnership with Regional Plains Medical Center to develop a community garden

Community transformation in Clovis has, to date, reached 92% of CMS elementary schools (4,441 students)

The small outlying school districts of Texico, Melrose and Grady have also begun to implement healthy eating and active living strategies. This past year, 52 K-5 students participated in the 5.2.1.O Challenge at Texico Elementary.

Division. The City is considering how it can link streets and trails to make it easier for people to walk and bike around town, instead of residents driving to each separate trail as they do now. Healthy Kids will help design and promote the trails.

Making it easier for people to be active in Clovis may help shift the mindset of a community that doesn't currently consider active living an option. "That's going to create an opportunity for a lot of cultural change in our active transportation area, which to me is ultimate sustainability," Gray said.

Healthy Kids Healthy Curry County is fortunate that Clovis already has strong resources for their children, including new salad bars in schools as well as school yards that are open, safe and available for community use after hours and on weekends. Gray's job is to market those resources.

He arranged a work day at Mesa Elementary, where volunteers painted 1,062 horseshoes along the ¼-mile walking trail and placed a sign welcoming community members into the play area. He plans to install welcoming signs at the entrance of each school to ensure that the public knows the playground is open for anyone to use during non-school hours.



"Our school yards are open, but so much of our community doesn't know that it's useable space," Gray said. "We're able to partner with the schools because they want to be known as community centers."



He's also working with the schools to inform parents that almost every elementary school has new salad bars stocked with vegetables, fruit and whole grains. Providing children with the opportunity to try fruits and vegetables at schools can help them develop healthy eating habits.

"A lot of these kids don't get this stuff at home," said Paul Klein, director of student nutrition for the Clovis Municipal Schools. "They hear about it, but they don't have access to it," he said.

Instead of a traditional salad bar where people select individual items with tongs, these salad bars have pre-packaged bags of salad and fruit that kids can grab and go. Klein was surprised at how popular they were when he installed them last year.

“I think we’ve personally turned a corner from rejection of those products to it’s acceptable,” Klein said.

Giving kids a chance to choose vegetables seems to make a difference in their interest to eat them. Mesa Elementary’s Principal Julie Howell noticed that kids have typically tossed carrots into the trash when they are placed on their trays, but they eat the vegetable when they can choose it from the salad bar.

Healthy Kids Healthy Curry County incorporated healthy foods and physical activity in a fun health fair as a kick off to the 5-2-1-O Challenge. Mesa was one of six schools that participated in the fair and challenge, which asks elementary students to eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables a day, trim screen time to 2 hours or less per day, be active for at least 1 hour a day and drink lots of H₂O every day.

“Any time you can get kids active and using their body and making healthy choices, it’s going to be a good thing for them,” Howell said. “We always want to do what we can to teach the whole child.”



Mesa Elementary kicks off 5-2-1-O Challenge with fresh fruit samples

Gray was able to coordinate comprehensive health fairs because of the support from principals and teachers as well as local businesses and organizations. In addition to his core volunteers, Clovis Community College’s Nursing Program, Plains Regional Medical Center, Cummins Diesel, Clovis Municipal Schools, Paradise Market and Cannon Air Force Base all sent volunteers or donated produce for school health fairs.

Clovis has supported all of Healthy Kids Healthy Curry County’s efforts. Gray does his share of marketing too, including tapping into the popular social network, Facebook. His Facebook page for Healthy Kids Healthy Curry has generated more than 100 “likes” from supportive organizations.

His brightly colored page contains updates and pictures showing volunteers refurbishing Mesa Elementary’s playground and children participating in 5-2-1-O challenges and

health fairs. He posts tips on healthy eating and ideas for meals and physical activities families can do together.

An important component of Healthy Kids Healthy Curry County is making lasting, systemic changes. Gray asked organizations to adopt a school so healthy initiatives could continue without the need for ongoing funding. So far, six groups have agreed to adopt a school, which means they will host the health fair, run the challenge and help manage the school's garden.

“That creates buy in and sustainability,” Gray said.