



STORIES FROM THE FIELD

The Alliance for a Healthier Generation and Action for Healthy Kids support schools implementing wellness practices that enhance students' health and academic achievement. Each organization offers unique but complementary approaches that, when combined, provide a comprehensive array of **solutions and resources for schools across the country.**

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COLLABORATION WITHOUT COMPETITION:

A partnership
between Action for
Healthy Kids and
the Alliance for a
Healthier Generation
in Kentucky



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“When working in school wellness we don’t need to be marking our territory,” said John Cain, co-chairperson for Kentucky Action for Healthy Kids. “We need to say ‘I’m facing this obstacle, let’s work together.’ What I like about working with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation’s Healthy Schools Program is that there has never been an instance where there were turf issues. It was always ‘let’s make this work and make it work by working together.’ That was so refreshing.”

Patty Lane, relationship manager for the Alliance’s Healthy Schools Program in Kentucky, agrees with Cain. “It was all collaboration and no competition and that was what was key to our success.” The relationship between Cain and Lane started in January 2008 when Lane was hired to work with schools in some of the neediest areas in Kentucky to create healthier school environments. Cain reached out to her immediately. “At Action for Healthy Kids we pride ourselves on being able to work with various partners to maximize our bang for the buck. We don’t want to duplicate any services so I said ‘Welcome Aboard,’ and from that point on we started sharing information and inviting each other to everything we were involved with.”

ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS-KELLOGG’S TEAM GRANT PROGRAM

Action for Healthy Kids laid the foundation in 2007 by hiring Cain, who has deep roots in targeted rural communities in southeastern Kentucky, and beginning to invest in these communities. In the spring of 2008, then-Kentucky Action for Healthy Kids Chair Jackie Walters and her team applied for and received a grant from the Action for Healthy Kids – Kellogg’s Team Grant Program, funded by the Kellogg’s Corporate Citizenship Fund. After receiving two previous grants to develop infrastructure, this grant would allow the team to



directly help underserved schools and those with significant health and educational disparities create healthier environments. They chose to work in Owsley, Lee and Perry counties in southeastern Kentucky because of their strong need, Action for Healthy Kids' relationships, and the demonstrated leadership of Owsley County Superintendent Melinda Turner as a school wellness champion. In addition, by funding three adjoining districts, the project team could maximize time, travel, resources and the potential benefits. This set the stage for the partnership with the Alliance, which was interested in the same communities.

Cain recalled how the two organizations created a joint action plan to meet their needs, the schools' needs as well as those of the funder. "What we were asking these districts to do was to accept two new programs at one time," said Lane. "We just made up our minds from the get go that we were going to approach the district people together and told them we would work together so we are not duplicating anything." All three districts agreed to come on board.

The funding was to be used to create active school health committees with diverse representation at each school. The schools were also asked to complete a school-level assessment of health policies surrounding nutrition, physical activity and physical education. Based on their assessment results they would then develop and implement an

action plan using at least one resource developed or endorsed by Action for Healthy Kids. Each district would be given \$5000 to aid in implementation. An evaluation component was also required. Since this process was almost identical to the Healthy Schools Program's Six Step Process, it was very easy for the schools to participate in the complementary programs.

Cain said, "We needed the schools to do an assessment so the Healthy Schools Program Inventory was perfect. We used the Alliance's Framework and added a few Action for Healthy Kids requirements like using one of our resources and the evaluation piece at the end. It just works super well together."

This collaboration worked because we freely communicated with each other. It was an open book. We knew what each other was doing and where we both wanted to go.

—JOHN CAIN, CO-CHAIRPERSON FOR KENTUCKY ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS

According to Lane, "John's knowledge of local and state resources was so helpful to me. I was able to give schools Alliance resources and he was able to share Action for Healthy Kids resources. We brought other organizations together from across the state like Save the Children and Coordinated School Health. Again, it shows the strength of Kentucky to be able to use all these resources and stakeholders and to not have competition be an issue."

Schools across the districts ended the year with great successes and momentum to move forward. They made positive changes in school meals, afterschool programs, school employee wellness, competitive foods and beverages, and physical activity. Owsley County High School recently became the first school in Kentucky to earn the Bronze National Recognition Award from the Alliance for a Healthier Generation.

Cain and Lane are excited to see what next year will bring. Cain said, "This collaboration worked because we freely communicated with each other. It was an open book. We knew what each other was doing and where we both wanted to go."

Lane adds, "The relationship has been such a successful collaboration that I feel like I have a second 'cheerleader' out there spreading our message and connecting us with schools and districts across the state."

COOPERATION INCREASES CAPACITY:

A collaborative effort between Action for Healthy Kids and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation in Georgia



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COURTESY OF: ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS

When Georgia Action for Healthy Kids received a grant last summer to create model school/community partnerships to increase opportunities for physical activity and enhanced physical education programming for children attending four Atlanta-Metro schools, project coordinator Brenda Moore thought that the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program would be the ideal collaborator. She wanted to find someone who had established relationships with these schools and so reached out to Adrienne Gil, relationship manager in Georgia for the Healthy Schools Program, to help her identify schools that would be interested in participating.

Gil said, "I was already working with Fulton County schools in Atlanta and when Brenda approached me I was able to look over the schools' action plans to determine which ones were interested in physical activity and physical education programs and proposed four schools that I thought would be a good fit for the grant requirements."

Moore added, "It was great because the action plans and particulars of the funding were perfectly in line and that is why I believe it was a successful match." Gil introduced the schools

to Moore and then Moore began meeting with the schools to implement the grant. According to Gil, "All of the schools were on board and excited, everyone was grateful for the grant funding and additional technical assistance. To get this kind of extra one-on-one assistance from Brenda was awesome and they really appreciated it."

The four schools were required to complete a self-assessment, National Association for Sports and Physical Education (NASPE) equipment evaluation and participate in the collection of baseline

data. Then teachers and staff at each school, over 200 in total, received training in three programs: Game On! The Ultimate Wellness Challenge, Take 10! (a classroom-based physical activity program) and the PECAT (Physical Education Curriculum Analysis Tool). Lisa Perry, physical activity and physical education manager for the Healthy Schools Program, was able to provide additional guidance on the NASPE and PCAT programs. After the trainings were complete, each school received approximately \$5000 to help them carry out their action plans.

Moore said, “We helped the schools update their equipment to meet the NASPE standards. Given cutbacks in funding for physical education programs locally, that was huge. The equipment helped them increase the moderate to vigorous activity levels by 23% almost immediately.” The schools also implemented the Take 10! Program in classrooms. Moore said that some teachers were initially hesitant but then embraced the program and by the end of the school year were using it two or three times a week.

Two of the Fulton County Schools also added physical-activity based morning programs. Data was collected from each school on two different occasions. A physical activity assessment tool was used, as well as qualitative field notes and observations. The physical activity levels were extremely high in both settings, with over 60% of the students engaged in “highly active” activities on average.

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—BRENDA MOORE, ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS PROJECT COORDINATOR

In addition, the researchers found that many faculty members joined in the physical activity lessons in the morning before school began. On one account, there were upwards of 20 faculty members in the gym dancing, jump roping, stepping and doing calisthenics with students. Faculty members helped motivate students, and in return, student behavior was very good.

The schools also looked for ways to reach out to the parents over the course of the year and hosted Family Fun Nights or health fairs. From the Family Fun Night

survey that was administered, evaluators found that over 66% of all parents and guardians who attended were willing to volunteer in the future and thought the added physical activity was beneficial to their family. One school found that having the Family Fun Night on the same evening as the PTA meeting increased attendance threefold at the PTA meeting.

“Another school did the neatest thing,” said Moore. “They wanted to improve how they celebrate birthdays and the custodian suggested that instead of giving the kids food, why not just let them go be active in the gym? So they tried that and gave students water bottles and LIVESTRONG® bracelets. The principal reported that the kids were so excited that no one ever asked ‘where is the cake?’”

“The partnership between the Alliance’s Healthy Schools Program and Georgia Action for Healthy Kids was perfect because together we were able to identify schools in need, work with them to create an action plan, and then Action for Healthy Kids was able to provide funding and additional assistance to help the schools move through our process. All four schools ended up receiving the Bronze National Recognition Award from the Alliance for a Healthier Generation for creating healthier school environments,” said Gil.

Jacob Weiers, school wellness council chair at Liberty Point Elementary has also been recognized by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation with the Healthy Schools Program Champion Award. He will join a class of eight other champions from across the country who will serve as spokespeople for the Healthy Schools Program movement. Campbell Elementary received a silver medal from the Georgia Action for Healthy Kids Awards program.

Even though the funding has now ended, the schools have the resources and expertise to sustain and advance their physical education programs for years to come. Equipment obtained through the grant will continue to be utilized to increase student participation in moderate to vigorous activities in physical education classes, before school and during special events. Use of TAKE 10! and other classroom-based physical activity resources are now considered standard/best practices and will be mainstays of the instructional day. Other important changes for the schools include continuing before-school programs, family fitness nights and healthy birthday celebrations. In addition, Action for Healthy Kids is providing training and materials from the Cooper Institute’s Personal Empowerment Program to help teachers be healthier and model healthy behaviors to students. The Healthy Schools Program will continue to work with these schools in a three-year initiative to advance their school wellness program implementation. Action for Healthy Kids will also continue to provide resources and consulting to support these efforts. School representatives will share their journeys and lessons learned at Action for Healthy Kids’ Georgia school wellness summit in March 2010.

WORKING TOGETHER TO SPREAD A COMMON MESSAGE:

A collaborative effort between Action for Healthy Kids and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation in New Mexico



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In New Mexico, the Action for Healthy Kids Team and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program know that strong collaborations with stakeholder groups and schools create healthy change for children and communities, and these changes create healthy children ready to learn.

Viewing each other as key partners in their school wellness efforts, the two organizations have been able to coordinate with several important stakeholder groups in New Mexico to create a coordinated statewide action plan to fight childhood obesity, overweight and undernourishment that will impact children, schools and communities across the state through: collaborations with key stakeholder groups; providing networking and opportunities to share best practices for schools and the families they serve; sharing resources; and advocacy efforts, including supporting legislation encouraging healthy children and schools.

"Building relationships takes time. It doesn't happen magically," said Julie Garcia, New Mexico relationship manager for the Alliance's Healthy Schools Program. Fortunately, Garcia and

Action for Healthy Kids state team member Jennie McCary have taken the time to build these relationships over the years, "Julie and I have worked together for many years and we complement each other well. We are both organized and knew each other's work," says McCary.

Garcia and McCary are using the strengths of their organizations and others to begin forming regional Action for Healthy Kids networks that allow schools to convene, talk about issues, discuss barriers and successes, and learn from and with each other to create healthy learning environments for New Mexico's children. In one example, McCary and Garcia used the opportunity of a pre-conference session at a statewide school health conference last April to highlight their collaborative best practices in physical activity and nutrition policies for schools through an engaging

panel discussion. “The greatest thing Julie has brought is helping us bring our work to the local level,” said Action for Healthy Kids’ McCary. “She brings the rural perspective and reminds us that things are very different outside of Albuquerque and Santa Fe.”

Further, the panel successfully provided diverse perspectives, including those from a middle school principal serving mostly Native American students, a school-based health center coordinator, a food service director from northern New Mexico, and a parent involved with a school wellness council. According to Garcia, “It was a great example of a collaborative approach to obesity prevention. Each speaker brought a different element to the table. The parent had great insight on how schools can work with parents so it can be a reciprocal relationship.”

As a result of the joint conference event, there’s increased awareness and discussions about the need for more information on the roles of parents and families in creating healthier school environments. This has become a top priority for other organizations in New Mexico such as the Public Education Department and school-based health centers. McCary and Garcia note that other non-governmental organizations are also taking a closer look at the issue of parent engagement.

McCary said, “With our state action plan there is reliance on this key partnership between us and the Healthy Schools Program to engage parents, to work to identify what resources are out there and to offer more opportunities for schools across the state to come together to talk and share.”

To further this issue, Action for Healthy Kids and the Alliance’s Healthy Schools Program jointly submitted a grant proposal to fund workshops to train parents and school staff on creative ways to address wellness and become “change agents” for the health of children – at home and at school. With this funding, the workshops would be held this fall, led by the Alliance’s policy implementation advisor, and use parent engagement materials created by other Action for Healthy Kids Teams. Parents would receive information and tips to create a healthy home, and learn ways to become actively involved with the Action for Healthy Kids Team and local school wellness councils. Using standard evaluation tools, results of this program will be compared with other work being done with parent engagement by Action for Healthy Kids Teams across the country to learn more about how to successfully engage parents as change agents.

When it comes to the importance of maintaining their relationship Garcia said, “I think it is important, despite our limited time, to stay connected with Action for Healthy Kids either by sitting on a steering committee or being a really active member. They are such an important partner.”

McCary agrees. “I think Action for Healthy Kids Teams should be encouraged to look at Healthy Schools Program staff as key partners. Because they work with schools on creating sustainable change, we should be working collaboratively at the local level. They serve as another set of eyes and ears and can share successes. It is an additional set of hands to help move schools along in the right direction.”

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—JENNIE MCCARY, ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS STATE TEAM MEMBER