



Caring, Challenging, Learning . . . Every Student, Every Day!

Delta County School District: **A Success Story**



Colorado Healthy Schools Landscape

School districts, nonprofit organizations, and funders across Colorado have worked together to connect school communities with tools and resources to create healthy school environments. Through these coordinated and concerted efforts, Colorado schools have intentionally and thoughtfully decided to integrate health and wellness into their everyday culture and practices. This important focus on health and wellness in schools has resulted in numerous benefits to students including increased attendance, improved classroom performance, stronger student engagement, and a reduction in stress, for both students and staff.

With support from philanthropy, including generous support from The Colorado Health Foundation, as well as several funding streams from the Colorado Department of Education, Colorado school districts received multi-year grants to focus on health and wellness. Many districts used a portion of

the funds they received to create District Wellness Coordinator positions. District Wellness Coordinators play a pivotal role in promoting healthy school environments at the district level by coordinating policies, programs, and practices, identifying and understanding areas for improvement, as well as supporting schools to implement best practices and create environments conducive to making healthy lifestyle choices.

Simultaneous to the funds provided to support District Wellness Coordinator positions and local initiatives, The Colorado Health Foundation also funded state-wide organizations to support school districts as they worked to change systems and cultures. These funded state-wide organizations coordinated efforts and leveraged their specific expertise to offer a wide range of learning opportunities for District Wellness Coordinators, including trainings, workshops, webinars, networking events, and individual technical assistance.

This commitment from various sectors to create a unified and collaborative approach to support Colorado school districts became known colloquially as the "Healthy Schools Community."

The learning opportunities for the Healthy Schools Community were grounded in the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model. The WSCC model is a framework designed to guide all school stakeholders to collaboratively address health behaviors and create environments that promote health and wellness for students and staff. Districts and schools use the WSCC model to re-think and re-structure the way they approach learning and health. From the onset, there was a strong emphasis on planning for sustainability to ensure that the funding and efforts would have a long-lasting impact on the health and wellness of students.

Partnership between RMC Health and Delta County School District

RMC Health provides professional learning and capacity-building that empowers champions for healthy young people, so students of every background can live their best lives. RMC Health was honored to be one of the state-wide organizations to receive funding from The Colorado Health Foundation to provide support to school districts engaged in healthy schools work. RMC Health's support focused on developing the capacity of individual District Wellness Coordinators to lead health and wellness efforts at the district level and to support school level efforts. RMC Health provided professional learning opportunities including training, technical assistance, and resource development, emphasizing best practices for health and learning, as well as promoting systems thinking to ensure sustainability.

Additionally, in collaboration with other state-wide organizations, RMC Health coordinated and facilitated two ongoing opportunities to create a shared sense of purpose, connect District Wellness Coordinators on a regular basis, and provide skill-building learning to accelerate their work:

- 1 Healthy Schools Coordinator Meetings: biannual, in-person professional development events consisting of various learning formats/sessions, including keynote, roundtable, presentations, workshops, and peer-to-peer case studies
- 2 Coordinator Learning Communities: bimonthly, virtual events to increase statewide engagement and resource sharing on specific topics identified by District Wellness Coordinators

One of the districts RMC Health partnered with was Delta County School District (Delta Schools). Delta Schools is located in the Gunnison River Valley in west

central Colorado. The district encompasses five diverse communities, serving 5,000 students across four high schools, one alternative high school, three middle schools, six elementary schools, one K-8 school, and five early childhood centers. To further the district's commitment to supporting academic excellence and meeting the holistic needs of all students, Delta Schools applied for and received funding from The Colorado Health Foundation in 2017 for Healthy Schools work.

The focus of Delta Schools' Healthy Schools work was to address barriers to learning by using the WSCC model as a framework to support students in developing lifelong healthy living skills and behaviors. Delta Schools believes it is their role, as a member of the larger community, to model and actively promote healthy choices, physical activity, and balanced nutrition.



“The TA, Coordinator Meetings and trainings are HUGE. It’s so nice to know I am a part of a larger community doing this work and to have the ability to gain new knowledge and make supportive connections.”

- Angela Flores, District Wellness Coordinator





“The support system in itself is phenomenal. The connections, relationships, and overall support is great, especially [when] someone outside of the district can offer an objective perspective.”

-Angela Flores

Delta Schools also believes an integrated school, parent, and community approach is essential for the health and well-being of students. With this mindset, and with grant funds from The Colorado Health Foundation, Delta Schools hired two part-time District Wellness Coordinator positions to lead the district's Healthy Schools work.

Delta Schools Wellness Coordinators have been active members of the Healthy Schools Community and have participated in many of the offerings provided by state-wide organizations, including the biannual Healthy Schools Coordinator Meetings. RMC Health and Delta Schools also partnered to provide specific and tailored supports for the district's initiatives, including:

- 1** A full-day, in-person training on School Health Advisory Committees designed to help six schools plan and launch their health and wellness program
- 2** A two-part, in-person training series on School Health Advisory Committees designed to help an additional three schools launch their health and wellness program
- 3** Technical Assistance on effectively structuring District Health Advisory Committee meetings to focus on outcomes related to the Delta Schools' goals and beliefs
- 4** A three-part, virtual professional development event for school's to write and showcase their health and wellness efforts

Being able to provide staff and teachers with these types of trainings from experts in the field has been profound for the district. Angela Flores, one of Delta School's part-time District Wellness Coordinators, emphasized having access to these resources and providers is especially valuable because of the limited opportunities to receive support locally.

“The training helped us really look closer at data.”

- Delta school staff



Delta County School District and School-Level Infrastructure



In line with best practices, Delta Schools focused on building the necessary infrastructure to launch and sustain their Healthy Schools efforts. Delta formed their District Health Advisory Committee (DHAC) in 2017, within the first year of the grant. Facilitated by the District Wellness Coordinators, the DHAC is a diverse group of district, school, family, and community representatives who meet monthly to advance health and wellness initiatives in the district. After extensive data gathering, Delta's DHAC developed a Comprehensive Health and Wellness Plan, aligned with the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model to help meet the district's goals:

- 1 Provide a comprehensive learning environment for developing and practicing lifelong wellness behaviors**
- 2 Support and promote proper dietary habits contributing to students' health status and academic performance**
- 3 Provide opportunities for students to engage in physical activity**

Applying their learnings from the training and technical assistance provided by RMC Health, the District Wellness Coordinators were able to assist schools in creating adult-led School Health Advisory Committees, or as Delta Schools calls them, *Big SHACs*. At the end

of the 2019-20 school year, Delta Schools had nine active *Big SHACs*. The *Big SHACs* are uniquely positioned to understand how each school can use its assets to address district goals. Three schools have also formed *Little SHACs*, which are student run health committees to further engage students in the district's wellness efforts.

“Students want to contribute!”

says Angela Flores. The *Little SHAC* model is gaining traction across the district, creating meaningful ways for students to get involved and lead health and wellness efforts. Together these three groups (*DHAC, Big SHAC, Little SHAC*) support growth and development from the top down and the bottom up, engaging key stakeholders, including district level administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members.

The main focus of the *Big SHACs* was on developing School Health Improvement Plans to carry out activities at an individual school level to support the District's five-year Comprehensive Health and Wellness Plan. The District Wellness Coordinators facilitated district-wide meetings to bring together all the *Big SHACs* to strengthen the impact of wellness work in each school.

“The county-wide meetings that Angela and Shawna have organized are so valuable. It's really great to hear what other schools are doing and the ability to have these in-person meetings increases the networking among other schools. You can't do this in an email,”

says Dante Markley, *Big SHAC* leader at Cedaredge High School.

In support of the district's physical activity goal (**District Goal #3**) each school was asked to increase physical activity in their classrooms by 3-5 minutes daily. Schools relied on support from the *Big SHACs*, school leadership, students, families, community partners, and staff to help plan and implement health and wellness programs and activities to increase daily physical activity.

The district has also made great progress toward their dietary habits goal (**District Goal #2**). The district's greatest success is their Farm-to-School Program. Through the financial support of The Colorado Health Foundation grant, every elementary school has a school garden, for a total of 60 garden beds district-wide.



Additionally, through a partnership with Mountain Roots Food Project, AmeriCorps members teach nutrition education and gardening classes, as well as provide resources for the school garden. The gardens provide hands-on learning for nutrition education and fun for students, while also fostering connections between classrooms, communities, and local farms.

Delta Schools has made great strides in creating school environments that support both learning and health for staff and students. Their approach combines efforts at all levels – district (*DHAC*), school (*Big SHACs*), and students (*Little SHACs*) – which increases the likelihood that innovative health and wellness practices will be implemented and sustained. Delta Schools is excited to work with its diverse stakeholders to expand their efforts and is optimistic they can create deeper connections throughout its schools and the entire community. As Angela Flores states,

“This work helps tie the different diverse communities in the district together. It’s bringing teachers together and families together under this common vision of the district. Every school and every community are supporting the same district goals but in a way that works for their community and students.”



Physical activity initiatives launched by the district’s *Big SHACs*:



Support alternative seating in classrooms.



Organize whole school physical activity challenges such as step challenge and Flat 14ers.



Promote students walking outside during class as part of instructional time.



Integrate mindfulness in classrooms.



Incorporate brain breaks during classroom instruction.

School Showcase:

Cedaredge High School

Cedaredge High School (CHS), in the town of Cedaredge, serves just under 300 students. CHS is a small, close knit community where staff serve in multiple roles and most students are involved in multiple extracurricular activities. Health and wellness has always been a priority for CHS, but the additional support from the District Wellness Coordinators and the clear focus of the district goals has enabled the school to accelerate its work.

CHS formed its *Big SHAC* in 2018, with the principal, counselor, and teacher/coach as inaugural members. Currently, the *Big SHAC* at CHS is working diligently to address the district's physical activity goal (**District Goal #3**), as well as provide social-emotional supports for students such as *Sources of Strength* (a program that utilizes peer social networks to prevent suicide, bullying, and substance use). Additionally, the school has an active *Little SHAC* with passionate students who are actively changing the culture of health and wellness in their schools.

CHS has the full support of its principal and engaged staff and students who are always ready to participate.

“We have great kids and staff at this school. The greatest challenge is choosing what to focus on and implement because we have so many great ideas and want to do it all!”

***-Dante Markley,
Big SHAC Leader***



Health and Wellness Activities organized by *Big and Little SHACs* at CHS include:



Conduct a 40-booth Health Fair based on data collected from interest meetings led by the *Little SHAC*.



Organize The Gallon Challenge - a week-long challenge to educate students about the importance of hydration.



Plan a Bike to School Day to encourage physical activity and rider safety.



Incorporate physical activity into a mandatory 24-minute intervention class for all students.



Create step challenges and healthy weight challenges for staff.



Host year-end 5k Color Run to promote school community and physical activity.



Disseminate weekly “Week Ahead” newsletters every Sunday with a healthy nutrition tip.

School Showcase:

Garnet Mesa Elementary

Garnet Mesa Elementary School (GMES) is one of five schools located in the city of Delta and serves 550 students in grades K-5. The school was designated a Capturing Kids Hearts showcase school in 2020 by the Flippen Group based on its school climate, highly passionate teachers, and children that love coming to school.

The *Big SHAC* at GMES was formed in 2019 with three teachers, one interventionist, one support staff, and two parents. Members of the *Big SHAC* attended RMC Health's full-day training and were very motivated to write their health and wellness mission statement, select best practices to support the district's goals, and write a School Health Improvement Plan. The team analyzed and selected priorities based on their school's Smart Source data:

- 1 Support staff wellness
- 2 Increase social and emotional learning (SEL) in classrooms
- 3 Teach nutrition lessons
- 4 Provide physical activity instruction in classrooms

Then, the team developed SMART goals for their priorities. In addition to reviewing and analyzing data from Smart Source, the *Big SHAC* also collected and reviewed data from a staff survey in order to further understand mental, physical, and emotional needs of staff. The *Big SHAC* used this information to organize after-school adult fitness classes and used grant funds to purchase equipment such as yoga mats, fit bars, and resistance bands for the classes.



“This is pretty much running itself right now. We have enough volunteers to run after-school fitness classes and other activities. It’s been neat from a coordinator’s perspective to see something take root and continue without having to do it yourself,”

says Jaime Ogden, *Big SHAC* leader at GMES.

To address the SEL needs of their students, Shawna Angelo, one of Delta's District Wellness Coordinator, delivers SEL lessons to students, as well as supports teachers to incorporate SEL into their own classroom practices. In addition, to expand their counseling services, the school applied for and was awarded a state grant to hire a counselor to provide additional supports for students.

To support **District Goal #2**, Jaime is leading *A Daily Dozen* program that teaches students about 12 plant foods to

include in a healthy diet. The Green House Club, also known as the school's *Little SHAC*, is making Daily Dozen posters to hang in the cafeteria.

“The kids are being exposed to foods and are learning why it’s important to eat these foods for your health and they like the foods!”

says Jaime. As part of the school's garden project, AmeriCorps members teach lessons focused on nutritional standards, while helping with garden upkeep and garden education. To support **District Goal #3**, the school used grant funds to purchase pedometers for teachers to use with students in class. Teachers are also integrating physical activity and brain breaks in the classroom.

“So many little pieces are coming together through the passion and hard work of our leaders and staff that it is creating a net for our kids.”

-Jaime Ogden, Big SHAC Leader

School Showcase:

North Fork Montessori @ Crawford

North Fork Montessori @ Crawford (NFM@C) is an alternative school located in the town of Crawford that serves 150 students. The school is a choice school and attracts a diverse student population. The mission of NFM@C is to nurture each child's natural desire to learn and passion for discovery. As a Montessori school, NFM@C embraces the whole child approach, making this an ideal school to take on the district's health and wellness initiatives.

The school's *Big SHAC* was formed in December 2019, consisting of two teachers, a PE coach, and three parents. The school has focused primarily on increasing physical activity (**District Goal #3**) as emphasized in their School Health Improvement Plan, drafted after the training with RMC Health. The school is also poised to start incorporating mental health practices into the daily routine of teachers and students, as well as creating a specific staff wellness goal.

As a Montessori school, many aspects of a healthy school are naturally built into their environment. Over the last two years, the school implemented a mindfulness curriculum, *Mind Up*, in addition to *Grace and Courtesy* lessons that teach children



vocabulary, actions, and steps to build awareness and responsiveness to those around them. Students' seating is flexible: no assigned seats, ability to move freely around the classroom, and sit, stand, or work on a rug. Additionally, experiential learning is part of the culture and reinforces the whole child approach. For example, the school supports 4th through 6th graders to take lessons at a local ski resort through funds raised by their parent organization. These experiences positively impact self-esteem and the social and emotional well-being of students, according to Sara Puharich, leader of the school's *Big SHAC*.

“The school is really focused on the whole child and educating them in a way that meets them where they are and gives them experiences to become who they are. It is a whole child, child-centered approach, focused on building them as people and citizens who have different needs and meeting those needs.”

-Sarah Puharich, Big SHAC Leader

New activities incorporated into existing practices at NFM@C include:



Host an annual 5K Color Run.



Organize a student triathlon.



Provide classroom sets of Fit Sticks to use for movement breaks during class.



Plan initial phases of a Lunch and Learn for students about the benefits of movement.



Integrate physical activity and mindfulness into garden activities and lessons.



Foster adult-student relationships, through strategies such as the principal regularly playing basketball with students.



Create a Challenge Week focused on three movements:

1

Mindful Movement – students learn about meditation and yoga.

2

Increase Your Distance – students track steps towards distance goals such as reaching Colorado mountain peaks.

3

Increase Your Strength – students track the weight they can lift and add it up over time to “lift” objects, such as the weight of a car.