

Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Success Story



Lawndale Elementary School District's Water Access and Appeal Campaign

Background

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) partnered with Lawndale Elementary School District (LESD) to work on a variety of strategies, which includes conducting nutrition education, increasing healthy food access by implementing expanded/mobile produce distributions, implementing the Smarter Lunchroom Movement, installing hydration stations, implementing share tables, and improving physical activity in afterschool settings through implementation of CATCH Kids Club. LESD is a public-school district in the South Bay of Los Angeles, serving over 4,700 students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. Students are predominantly students of color with nearly 84% of them qualifying for free and reduced-price meals.

Since November 2021, LESD'S CalFresh Healthy Living Program (CFHL) has been working with Jane Addams Middle School's (JAMS) Leadership students on a Water Access and Appeal strategy utilizing the youth-led participatory action research (YPAR) framework. As part of this strategy, the CFHL team introduced the students to topics of wellness, social determinants of health, and guided students through the campaigning process to promote drinking water and restrict sugar sweetened beverages.

Sugar-sweetened beverage consumption has been linked with poor health outcomes in both children and adults. The Water Access and Appeal strategy aimed to promote water consumption by highlighting hydration stations on campus. Both the CFHL team and Leadership students received support from a variety of partners coordinated by DPH, including National Health Foundation, FINN Partners, the LESD Food Services Department, and the JAMS staff and administration. The project introduced students to various steps of campaigning beginning with research, data collection, data analysis, intervention planning, marketing, presenting to stakeholders, and launching of the campaign. The campaign reached over 770 students between sixth and eighth grade.

Body

Leadership students conducted a pre- and post-assessment of student consumption and perceptions of water access points, knowledge of importance of water consumption, and impact of sugar-sweetened beverages on health. Survey results confirmed their lived experiences and observations that peers were not consuming water on campus.

The pre-assessment found that the majority of students recognized water is needed to keep their bodies healthy (96%) but that there were significant barriers to consuming water on campus. The top three barriers to drinking water on campus were as follows:

- (1) The hydration station and water fountains being perceived as dirty (50.2%)
- (2) Water in hydration stations and fountains having poor taste (40.1%)
- (3) Water fountain closures due to COVID-19 precautions, with the exceptions of the refillable-hydration station and a few traditional fountains (33%)

Prior to launching the campaign, Leadership students had the opportunity to present all of their hard work and proposed interventions at an April 2022 LESD school board meeting. Once all items were finalized, the campaign launched in late April 2022 and ran through the end of the school year in June 2022.



To address the water's poor taste, students proposed the use of fruit-herb infused water. Students developed promotional posters to encourage peers to bring reusable water bottles and a video on how to prepare fruit-herb infused water which was shared bi-weekly on Bengal News, a Leadership run television broadcast. The CFHL team assisted in preparing kits of fruit and herbs for students. LESD Food Services staff offered the pre-portioned kits during breakfast and lunch every Friday after the campaign launch for students. To address hydration station sanitation

perception, students developed a role-play scenario which shows student behaviors which contribute to the poor perception and a corrective action / proper way to use the hydration station. This video was also played bi-weekly on Bengal News. The third barrier of water fountain closures was outside of student control due to district wide COVID-19 safety protocols.

Intervention methods were also based on survey results. JAMS students identified Bengal News (48.5%) and friends and classmates (31.6%) as being the most important sources of information/news on campus. Additionally, when posters and flyers are utilized, they found that hand drawn materials were most influential.

During the last two weeks of school, students administered a post-assessment survey. The post-assessment survey found that more students reported knowing their body needing water to be healthy at school (+2%), knowing how much water to have in a day (+3%), and more students reported bringing water to school (free response). 13.3% reported that the fruit-herb water kits offered made drinking water more enjoyable, 9.7% of respondents reported that kits did not make drinking water more enjoyable, while 77% reported not having used the kits. Additionally, more students reported bringing water to school after the launch of the campaign.

With the Water Access and Appeal strategy, Leadership students were empowered to be the voice of change. They experienced being researchers and changemakers. They successfully researched, collected data, developed interventions, implemented interventions and assessed results. In addition, they will be leaving behind their research to be passed on to the next cohort to assess and work to improve the campaign.

Favorite Quote

“So many people in class were using their reusable water bottles in class! It was so cool to see them adding their kits to the water.” – A.I., 8th grader at Jane Addams Middle School Leadership Students

Funding

California's CalFresh Healthy Living, with funding from the United States Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – USDA SNAP, produced this material. These institutions are equal opportunity providers and employers. For important nutrition information, visit www.CalFreshHealthyLiving.org.