AMERICA'S HEALTHIEST SCHOOLS: HOW WE THRIVE

Montview Elementary School

Aurora, Colorado

Kaiser Permanente knows healthy schools support improved learning for children and higher job satisfaction among teachers and staff. That's why every year we are proud to sponsor America's Healthiest Schools, one of the country's longest-running national recognition programs honoring schools for their achievements in supporting the comprehensive health needs of students, teachers, and school staff.

In partnership with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, the annual awards recognize schools for implementing best practices and policies in up to nine topic areas related to advancing the physical, mental, and social-emotional health of staff, students, and families.

1,120 schools across 35 states were recognized in 2025, including Montview Elementary in Aurora, Colorado.

On the blacktop at Montview Elementary, dismissal looks a little different. Parent volunteers, known as Montview Active Parents (MAP) set up tables stacked with Colorado-grown fresh fruits and vegetables while students and families line up, greeting friends and teachers as they head home for the day. This monthly food distribution, organized and led by this parent collective isn't just about groceries. It's about community.

This community-centered approach - known within Aurora Public Schools (APS) as the community hub model - is part of why Montview Elementary School was recognized as one of America's Healthiest Schools in 2025.

Montview serves a richly diverse community, where more than 90% of families qualify for free and reduced-price meals, and 73% of students are multilingual learners, the highest percentage in the district. With the vision and leadership of Montview Principal Joe Taylor and in alignment with APS's strategic plan, Montview is an aspiring community hub that partners closely with families to build community solutions together.

From Listening to Leading

Montview's efforts to address food security began during the COVID-19 pandemic, when families needed immediate access to food during school closures. Aurora Public Schools and community organizations hosted food distribution events to ensure families' needs were met.

To learn more, contact ThrivingSchools@kp.org, visit kp.org/thrivingschools, or follow @thrivingschools on X."

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As the acute phase of the pandemic passed, access to health, nutritious food at home remained a concern for many. Data from Food Justice of Northwest Aurora and Hunger Free Colorado shows that students in Montview's area face some of the highest rates of food insecurity in the state.

Instead of stepping back, Montview leaned in, committing to a sustainable, long-term approach rooted in family leadership and strong partnerships.

A Comprehensive Approach

At the heart of Montview's recognition is the way the school community addresses nutrition and food access. Due to the Healthy School Meals for All program, Montview provides free breakfast and lunch to all students, eliminating cost barriers and stigma. A second-chance breakfast ensures that even students who arrive late start the day nourished and ready to learn.

Inside the cafeteria, fresh fruit and vegetables, welcoming staff, and culturally responsive menus make healthy eating inviting. Menus feature Colorado-grown delicious produce, monthly promotions, and daily vegetarian and halal options shaped by student and family feedback.

These strategies have driven a 16% increase in school meal participation, a key indicator of success.

Learning About Food—In and Out of the Cafeteria

Nutrition education has extended beyond mealtime. For more than 6+ years, through a partnership with the Colorado School of Public Health's SNAP-Ed program, students across all grade levels participated in hands-on lessons that included cooking, taste testing, and learning about where food comes from.

To guide and strengthen this work, Montview used Kaiser Permanente's Thriving Schools Integrated Assessment (TSIA).

"This work is about continuous improvement – we're never finished," said Susan Gershwin, Montview's Community School Coordinator, who works in partnership with Principal Taylor, the Montview Active Parents, and more than 50 community partners in service of students and families to implement the community hub model. "The TSIA helps us see what we are doing well and what families are still telling us they need. It pushes us to always think more collaboratively and intentionally about expanding food access."

Powered by Partnership

Montview's impact extends well beyond the school day. Partnerships with Adams County Health Department, Aurora Interfaith, Food Justice of Northwest Aurora, Food Bank of the Rockies, Common Harvest Colorado, SECOR Cares, Montview Boys and Girls Club, and the

Aurora Public Schools Food Clinic bring fresh food markets, food pantries, grocery distribution, after-school meals, and benefits support directly to families.

What makes the work sustainable is family leadership and Montview's collaborative leadership structure. Caregivers plan and lead food distribution events, ensuring the effort remains responsive, culturally relevant, and community-driven.

"Our families aren't just receiving support – they're shaping the solutions," Gershwin says.

Montview Elementary's recognition as one of America's Healthiest Schools in 2025 celebrates more than improved menus or increased meal counts. It honors a school that listens, partners, and acts – creating a system of care that nourishes students and families alike. From the blacktop to the cafeteria to the classroom, Montview demonstrates what's possible when schools lead with relationships – and let community guide the way.

The America's Healthiest Schools awards reinforce the mission of Kaiser Permanente's Thriving Schools initiative, which works to strengthen the health and well-being of school communities across the country, so every school succeeds, every employee excels, and every child thrives.

Kaiser Permanente is proud to be a partner in health to districts like Horton Elementary School throughout the year. For more information on Thriving Schools, visit kp.org/thrivingschools or follow @thrivingschools on X.

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