

Making Healthy, Clean Drinking Water the Norm

Martin Luther King Jr. High School – Pittsburg, CA | Pittsburg Unified School District

WHY WORK ON ACCESS TO CLEAN DRINKING WATER?

At Martin Luther King Jr. High School, teachers and staff are committed to creating a healthy campus. So when they noticed the unhealthy beverages available to their middle school students, they wanted to offer an easy, free, healthy option: fresh, clean drinking water. Teachers realized that water fountains provided limited water access, only during passing periods and lunch breaks. Teachers also wanted to align water access with the school's commitment to the environment. With the leadership of the science department, the school saw the perfect opportunity to advance health *and* sustainability by installing water bottle refill stations.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 6th to 8th grade
- 717 students
- 86% of students qualify for free or reduced price meals

ETHNICITY

- 7% Asian
- 27% Black/African-American
- 60% Latino
- 4% White/Caucasian
- 2% Multiracial/Other

ACTION STEPS

The project leveraged a Kaiser Permanente Thriving Schools Action Plan Grant to attract additional resources and in kind support from the school district and city to purchase and install two water bottle refill stations. After the water stations were installed, teachers in the science department included a module in all science classes on the health benefits of drinking water and staying hydrated. Students were encouraged to share what they learned about drinking water with their families and the community.

CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

Learning to navigate school and district "systems" was an initial challenge, particularly around understanding the various approvals required for installing water stations at the school, as well as for identifying and contacting the key decision makers that needed to be involved. For the project lead, it was difficult to take the time to learn and manage the approval process while fulfilling existing teaching responsibilities. Persistence, frequent follow-up with district staff, and the support of administrative leaders paved the path to successful water station installation.

IMPACTS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The project has helped to make fresh drinking water an easy and available option for the entire school community. Since the water stations were installed, the number of staff and students who regularly use the stations and refill their water bottles has significantly increased. The project has helped to

popularize drinking water, shifting norms away from unhealthy beverages. The water station installation provided an opportunity for discussions about health and water. According to the project lead, over two-thirds of students currently use the refill water stations, and staff use is at a similar level.

Over two-thirds of students currently use the refill water stations, and staff use is close to the same level.

ADVICE FOR OTHER SCHOOLS

Taking the time to navigate the district's infrastructure to successfully install the water stations built capacity of the school staff and resulted in a positive and long-lasting change. The project lead described the impact: "It's worth all the work to see the benefit everyday

as the water refill stations are being used on your campus. You can look at them and know it's part of the positive change you hope to bring to your school and community."

The grant made possible a change to the school that extends far beyond its gates and includes the community. The water refill stations serve as a catalyst for discussions of why we need [water stations], why water is good, and what are the health benefits.

-Science Teacher

For More Information:

Kaiser Permanente Thriving Schools
Northern California Region
share@kp.org

The Thriving Schools Action Plan Grant Program is funded by Kaiser Permanente and implemented in partnership with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program. Action Plan Grants support schools to create healthy school environments for students and staff. This case study was developed based on the school's responses to the Action Plan Grants year-end survey.

Prepared by Ad Lucem Consulting | www.adlucemconsulting.com

