

Staff and Students Partner for Healthy Hydration

El Cerrito High School – El Cerrito, CA | West Contra Costa Unified School District

WHY ENGAGE STUDENT LEADERS TO SUPPORT WELLNESS?

Committed to creating a healthy school environment for students and staff, El Cerrito High School has made great strides in not only raising awareness about health, but also engaging stakeholders at all levels in designing and implementing wellness initiatives. The school health team, which sets the direction for school-wide health promotion efforts, is made up of the principal, two staff from the school's health center, a physical education teacher, and two students. When student leaders from the Green Justice club raised concerns about access to clean, fresh drinking water from the school's aging water fountains, the health team agreed that this issue aligned closely with school wellness priorities. With staff and students alike recognizing water as a critical component to health, school health center staff and student leaders formed a partnership with the goal of installing new water stations at their school.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 9-12 grade
- 1482 students
- 50% of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals

ETHNICITY

- 28.4% Latino
- 27.5% White
- 20.2% Black/African-American
- 17.9% Asian
- 3% Filipino
- 1.9% Two or More Races
- 0.3% American Indian or Alaska Native
- 0.8% Pacific Islander

ACTION STEPS

Through the support of a Thriving Schools Action Plan Grant, school health center staff worked with student leaders to begin planning. The first step for the project was to identify the water station locations that would be most accessible to students and staff. After conducting research on available equipment, the planning team worked with school maintenance and district staff to purchase and install two water bottle filling stations near the school health center. Second, the school purchased BPA-free water bottles to distribute to students and staff. A school-wide kick-off event unveiled the water stations at the health center in celebratory fashion.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

The planning team faced initial hurdles and delays in navigating the school district administrative process for securing the appropriate equipment and installation permissions. This included identifying key district staff members who were authorized to approve water station purchases. To keep things moving forward, the project lead contacted various district staff on a monthly basis, in addition to regular communication with the school principal and maintenance lead. Maintaining email records of these contacts was helpful in assuring follow-through on promised actions. The planning team also reached out to staff from other schools working on similar goals to collaborate on shared solutions.

Given delays in the project's timeline, the student leaders who initiated the water station project transitioned out of school before project completion. The health center staff weathered this transition by engaging a new group of student leaders who were working on other wellness initiatives. Given their experience as Youth Health Workers, these new student leaders jumped right in and committed to carrying the project to completion. These students led an education

campaign to encourage use of the water bottles and the filling stations, designing and hanging posters around campus to promote the link between water and health.

IMPACTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since the water bottle filling stations were installed, students and staff have been using their water bottles and refilling them at the stations. Staff have noticed increased water consumption among students as well as student conversations about the impact of drinking water on health. Teachers have further encouraged water consumption by allowing students to bring their water bottles into the classroom. Student leaders in the Youth Health Workers group are continuing their poster campaign to reach additional students with healthy hydration messages. The location of the stations near the school health center allows students and staff to interact with one another as they fill their water bottles.

ADVICE FOR OTHER SCHOOLS

Persistence in pursuing the project's goals helped the project leads keep momentum and overcome

the challenges they faced. Collaborating with staff from other schools working on similar goals was helpful for sharing ideas and engaging in collective problem solving. Finally, ongoing communications with the school's principal and maintenance lead helped to keep the school administration and key personnel up to date on project deadlines and move key decisions forward when needed.

"...Our water stations are a symbol of a healthy and environmentally friendly lifestyle...They are our village well, building community among students and staff who congregate there to fill their water bottles. The shared laughter, banter and conversation make this a sanctuary in the school building."

-Health Center Staff Member

For More Information:

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