

AMERICA'S HEALTHIEST SCHOOLS: HOW WE THRIVE

Carlos Santana Arts Academy

North Hills, California



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 whole health needs of students 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 students, staff, and families.

In 2023, 781 schools across 36 states were recognized, including Carlos Santana Arts Academy in North Hills, California.

Community collaboration is essential to Carlos Santana Arts Academy, from its mission statement to programs specifically designed to enhance community well-being.

Those ties to the community are one of the reasons the school was recognized last year as one of America's Healthiest Schools in the category of improving nutrition and food access.

Sitting in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles, North Hills was historically an agricultural community. Today, Carlos Santana Arts Academy honors its roots by partnering with the local food bank to provide fresh produce and non-perishables to families in need. The elementary school staff first underwent online food handler safety training before coordinating the monthly food distribution to hold themselves to the highest standards.

Going above and beyond in support of health and wellness isn't anything new for Carlos Santana Arts Academy staff and leadership. The dedicated staff collaborates closely with the school's Healthy Start Navigator, a valuable resource provided by the district's Wellness Programs department. This partnership ensures families receive essential services directly from the Navigator. This model ensures families receive devoted case management that connects them to a broad spectrum of health, mental health, and wellness resources, as well as access to home essentials. This unified approach connects families with the community supports they need to thrive.

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



The multi-lingual school also has a Student and Family Resource Navigator to support the needs of students, families, and community. The navigator helps alleviate barriers to learning by connecting student, family, and community needs to resources, giving special consideration to low-income students, English language learners, and foster youth.

All these roles and initiatives are part of deliberate decisions made by school staff and leadership. Decisions stem from thorough needs assessments, including the Thriving Schools Integrated Assessment (TSIA) and parent surveys. Last year, this process led to the establishment of a school pantry. Academy staff partner with local food pantries to supplement family's weekly groceries. In addition, a partnership with the Dairy Council of California teaches families how to prepare healthy meals and snacks through nutrition education classes held at the school's Parent Center.

"Our recommendation is to create a team at your school that can support efforts in bringing opportunities to the school," said Principal Barbara Avilez. "Collect and use formal and informal data to create action plans to help customize any programs implemented to meet your school's needs."

In fact, doing that analysis was also one of the biggest takeaways for Avilez and her team.

"In the process of applying for the America's Healthiest Schools award, our school utilized the opportunity to review our action plans to meet our set goals in improving food access to our families," she shared.

That application not only recognized Carlos Santana Arts Academy, but also celebrated the contributions of community partners like the Los Angeles Food Bank, Hope of Valley, and North Valley Caring Services. The school wouldn't have wanted it any other 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 schools like Carlos Santana Arts Academy throughout the year. For more information on Thriving Schools, visit kp.org/thrivingschools or follow @thrivingschools on X.

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