

AMERICA'S HEALTHIEST SCHOOLS: HOW WE THRIVE

Silver Creek Elementary School

Thornton, 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.

In 2024, 879 schools across 30 states were recognized, including Silver Creek Elementary School in Thornton, Colorado.

"Success doesn't come from what you do occasionally. It comes from what you do consistently." This quote by Marie Forleo, an American entrepreneur, hangs in the halls of Silver Creek Elementary surrounded by banners from the Colorado Department of Education celebrating awards of distinction and excellence.

It comes as no surprise that this school in the suburbs of Denver is one of this year's American's Healthiest Schools All-Star winners, recognized for thriving in all 9 award topic areas – one of 66 schools to earn this distinction in 2024.

One key to this achievement for the Silver Creek Elementary Eagles staff and leadership team is the regular use of the Thriving Schools Integrated Assessment (TSIA) and Resilience in School Environments (RISE) Index. Both assessment tools were developed by Kaiser Permanente in partnership with Healthier Generation and are available to all schools nationwide at no cost.

"Silver Creek has routinely utilized the RISE Index over the past couple of years to assess policies and practices related to the social-emotional health of staff and students and identify areas for improvement. When the America's Healthiest Schools application came out for 2024, we decided to complete the entire Thriving Schools Integrated Assessment, which expands across 14 different topic areas," said Principal Darren Oliver. "It was a great way for us to set goals and ideas for implementation of current best practices."

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Since opening its doors in 2006, Silver Creek Elementary has aimed for excellence inside and outside the classroom. That commitment shows, as they were awarded in each of the 9 America's Healthiest Schools award categories, which are:

1. Strengthening Social-Emotional Health & Learning, *presented by Kaiser Permanente*
2. Cultivating Staff Well-Being, *presented by Kaiser Permanente*
3. Increasing Family & Community Engagement
4. Improving Nutrition & Food Access
5. Implementing Local School Wellness Policy
6. Bolstering Physical Education & Activity
7. Enriching Health Education
8. Promoting Tobacco-Free Schools
9. Supporting School Health Services

The process of applying for this year's award revealed the staff had accomplished many successes, just one of several lessons learned by the school.

"We didn't realize that we do so much for educating our students. It helped to write it down and put the information into categories," said Principal Darren Oliver.

Winning in all 9 categories means they have done meaningful work and documented achievements across many activities and programs. Here are some highlights of the work across several award categories:

Strengthening Social-Emotional Health and Learning

The mission at Silver Creek is S.O.A.R.ing to Excellence in All We Do. S.O.A.R. stands for Safety, Organized, Attitude, and Respect. Students and staff around Silver Creek use SOAR language to reinforce behaviors and maintain a positive and productive learning environment. Students and staff talk about being safe (emotionally and physically), being organized (on time, write in planner, etc.), having a positive attitude (for self and others), and being respectful (to self, others, and our school).

Every grade level and classroom at Silver Creek Elementary intentionally promotes and practices social-emotional learning skills both with instruction and throughout the school day. For example, all classrooms start the day with a positive morning meeting where students practice social skills, build relationships, build emotion regulation skills, and set goals. In addition, all classrooms, as well as the main office,

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have Calm Corners or Break Spaces available to students to practice emotional regulation when needed.

Cultivating Staff Well-Being

Two years ago the staff lounge, the primary place for breaks during the day, was redecorated to support stress reduction and increase well-being. The walls are a warm blue color, and there is soft lighting strung through the room, including a coffee bar and kitchen. There are bulletin and white boards in the space for general announcements and mindfulness/resilient activities. Staff have access to a library of books (not professional learning texts) as well as thank-you cards and journaling supplies.

The school also uses daily shout-outs for students and staff during morning announcements. Any staff member or student can submit a shout-out to another person at Silver Creek, helping create a positive culture that emphasizes gratitude.

"It is great to celebrate your community and students, but it's especially important to celebrate the work that the staff does on a daily basis," said Principal Oliver.

Increasing Family and Community Engagement

This year, each grade level team planned to bring in families to get parents involved in their child's learning and engaged in the school. One example is the second-grade Reading Bistro event, where students and their families made reservations to come into the classroom and go through a menu of reading activities together. When the event was finished, parents wrote a note of reading feedback for their child and placed it in the tip jar. The event was a hit, and the critical connection between school and home for reading success was celebrated.

Improving Nutrition and Food Access

Most of the food and beverage options around Silver Creek have "Go, Slow, Whoa" signage, designed to be an easy reminder on how to make good choices. Go: encourages eating healthy foods like vegetables, fruits, and protein. Slow: eating foods like rice, pasta, peanut butter, and baked chips in moderation. Whoa: only eating specific foods like french fries, muffins, doughnuts, cheese, candy, desserts on a limited basis.

Implementing Local School Wellness Policy

One of the most important keys to the school's success with health and wellbeing is having an overarching policy, complete with deadlines and regular follow-up meetings. The school wellness team meets 4 times a year. After each meeting, Wellness Team Leader Joel Bunn meets with Principal Oliver to fill him in on the discussion topics. The principal is often able to help communicate with staff and families to support the team's initiatives. Having leadership who is a huge supporter

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of the initiative and works hard to support an elementary building that prioritizes student and staff wellness is an invaluable part of their achievements, according to Principal Oliver.

As pleased as the Silver Creek team is to have received the 2024 America's Healthiest Schools award and to have been one of a small group across the country to excel in all categories, they have their eyes on the continued work ahead.

"We realized we do a lot for our students and community, but we can always grow in the areas of healthy choices and positive mental health," said Oliver.

The staff and students at Silver Creek are proving that excellence and success do, in fact, come from doing the work consistently. We can't wait to see what they do next year!

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 Silver Creek Elementary School throughout the year. For more information on Thriving Schools, visit kp.org/thrivingschools or follow [@thrivingschools](https://twitter.com/thrivingschools) on X.

[Learn more](#) about the America's Healthiest Schools awards.

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