

AMERICA'S HEALTHIEST SCHOOLS: HOW WE THRIVE

Horton Elementary School

San Diego, 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 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, 839 schools across 30 states were recognized, including Horton Elementary School in San Diego.

Sitting on the coast of the Pacific Ocean with 70 miles of beaches, San Diego enjoys nearly 300 days of sunshine each year.

But the weather isn't the only outstanding thing in San Diego. Horton Elementary School was named one of America's Healthiest Schools 2024 All-Star winners, recognized for thriving in all 9 award topic areas. Horton was one of only 66 schools to earn this distinction last year.

Located in the Chollas View neighborhood – named for the abundance of the cholla cactus that covered the land – Horton Elementary School has 378 students, the majority of which are English-language learners.

That diversity, and the rich history and culture San Diego embraces, extends to the staff at Horton Elementary, who are committed to building a healthy school environment for their students by inviting families and caregivers in to create a team effort.

Their biggest advice to other schools looking to replicate their success? Create an atmosphere of sharing and connection.

"Take a step back and look at your community as a whole. Then look within your school, reflect on your best practices, and seek out partners by checking in with your neighboring schools for resources. When the resources do not come to you, go out and look for them," said Renee Arintoc, health technician and wellness coordinator at Horton Elementary.

To learn more, contact ThrivingSchools@kp.org, visit kp.org/thrivingschools, or follow [@thrivingschools](https://twitter.com/thrivingschools) on X."



“Share your stories and eventually, members of your community will feel empathy for one another, foster a sense of belonging, and have desire to do better for one another.”

Horton Elementary School was recognized for all 9 America’s Healthiest Schools award categories, which are:

1. Strengthening Social-Emotional Health & Learning, sponsored by Kaiser Permanente
2. Cultivating Staff Well-Being, sponsored 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

Their success is due to their deep intentionality to identify what and where to focus efforts. The Wellness Committee at Horton assigns parts of the [Thriving Schools Integrated Assessment](#) tool to specific teachers and other sub-committees with the modules they specialize in.

For example, school counselors completed the social emotional module, the Parent/Family Engagement Committee worked on the parent engagement module, health office staff took care of the health services portion, and the physical education enrichment teacher assisted with the physical activity portion. The Wellness Committee worked on the remainder of the modules and tapped into the resources available through the [Action Center](#) to help achieve higher levels of wellness within the school community.

Here are examples of the work they did:

Cultivating staff well-being

The team created a survey to share with all staff to help engage them in physical activity. The survey asked what days and times worked best, and provided a list of physical activities they would like to participate in. From that, the team was able to schedule a few sessions on site. They were also able to create fun moments for gathering, like potlucks, restaurant meet-ups, and inclusive seasonal celebrations.

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Supporting school health services

The San Diego Unified School District has several yearly state-mandated health screenings for to all students. The district notifies all parents and guardians in an available handbook and through notifications from the school of scheduled screenings. To ensure students with health conditions receive the care they need, the school team works closely with families and physicians and notifies teachers and staff about any specific conditions identified by their health teams.

Improving nutrition and food access

Recognizing the importance of consistent nutrition, Horton Elementary proactively addresses food security through a partnership with a local food pantry. The school provides weekly snack bags and monthly family meal bags, readily promoted via their website, QR codes, and flyers. A convenient referral form allows staff to provide immediate support on-site. Beyond this, all students benefit from free, balanced breakfasts and lunches, with staff empowered to offer second breakfasts for those needing additional nourishment. To accommodate late arrivals, the school also created an easy-to-access breakfast option, ensuring no student starts the day hungry.

While the team at Horton Elementary School is humble about the success of their work, they recognize there are some lessons other schools can use. One of the biggest takeaways after completing the Thriving Schools Integrated Assessment was that most practices were already in place, with some needing slight modification. The staff at Horton Elementary, like most schools, work hard to promote health and wellness throughout the year.

“We are filled with gratitude knowing we are putting our best foot forward to provide our community with district-provided resources or engaging community organizations and promoting their valuable resources.” said Arintoc. “We will continue to engage and grow our bonds so we can continue to create the healthiest school environment for our students, their families, and our staff.”

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](https://twitter.com/thrivingschools) on X.

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

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