AMERICA'S HEALTHIEST SCHOOLS: HOW WE THRIVE

W. J. C. Trapp Elementary School

Rialto, 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.

1,120 schools across 35 states were recognized in 2025, including W. J. C. Trapp Elementary in Rialto, California.

At W. J. C. Trapp Elementary School, health and well-being are foundational to creating an environment conducive to learning. Located about 50 miles east from Los Angeles, the school earned its 2025 America's Healthiest Schools distinction for its commitment to the categories sponsored by Kaiser Permanente –Strengthening Social and Emotional Health, and Learning and Cultivating Staff Well-Being. The school also received honors for its work in Improving Nutrition and Food Access and Supporting School Health Services. These recognitions reflect a comprehensive, systems-driven approach to student success.

"Participating in America's Healthiest Schools allowed us to really see both our strengths and our opportunities," said Principal Berenice Gutierrez. "It helped us recognize the positive impact we're having on our students and school community, and where we can continue to grow."

Strengthening Social and Emotional Learning Schoolwide

Trapp's commitment to social and emotional learning (SEL) is visible in every classroom. Through Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), the school has established clear expectations and a shared language that helps students understand behavior, emotions, and relationships across all settings, from time in the classroom to recess breaks.

Every classroom includes a calming corner where students can independently practice the soothing strategies they are explicitly taught. When challenges arise, these restorative

practices guide students through reflection, accountability, and repair, which help them reconnect with peers and the school community instead of feeling excluded.

"When students feel safe, supported, and understood, learning improves," Gutierrez said. "Restorative conversations help students take responsibility while reinforcing that they belong here."

Cultivating Staff Well-Being and Connection

Trapp Elementary places just as much care into supporting the adults who make the school thrive. Throughout the year, staff come together for holiday potlucks, monthly birthday celebrations, and relationship-building activities designed to strengthen connection beyond day-to-day work.

A unique activity designed to uncover shared interests is photo sharing, where staff use pictures from their phones to share stories and learn more about one another in a relaxed, personal way.

One favorite tradition is the annual Thanksgiving hike, where staff are invited to bring family members, friends, and even pets. In addition, gratitude boards in the staff room encourage daily appreciation.

School administrators and leadership prioritize staff well-being. They understand that when educators and school employees feel seen, valued, and supported, they are better able to bring their best selves to the classroom. This sense of care and belonging fosters stronger relationships, increased collaboration, and a more positive environment where students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Supporting Physical Health

Like with most initiatives, Trapp Elementary has built clear, consistent systems to ensure students' health needs are identified early and addressed with care. From annual hearing and vision screenings to schoolwide dental screenings, the school prioritizes prevention and early intervention.

If there is a concern, families receive follow-up through multiple channels to ensure no student falls through the cracks. The school nurse plays a central coordinating role, collaborating with caregivers, medical providers, and staff to develop individualized health plans and emergency protocols that support students throughout the school day.

Nourishing Bodies and Minds

Nutrition is another cornerstone of Trapp's healthy school environment. Breakfast is served daily in classrooms, allowing students to eat alongside their teachers in a comfortable, stigma-free setting. Trapp also participates in a program that provides fresh fruit and vegetables to all K-5 students each week.

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

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Lessons Learned

Trapp's biggest takeaway from the past year is that relationships and systems go hand in hand. Clear routines, shared language, and predictable supports help remove barriers, while strong relationships make those systems meaningful and sustainable.

Their advice to other schools: start small, focus on consistency, and invest in people.

"Build a few strong systems that make support easy, lean on your nurse and wellness partners, teach common SEL language schoolwide, and don't overlook staff well-being," Gutierrez said. "Low-cost, intentional practices can make a powerful difference."

What makes W. J. C. Trapp Elementary stand out isn't just what they do – it's how they do it. With strong systems, caring relationships, and a whole lot of heart, the school has created an environment where wellness supports learning and connection fuels success.

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 on X.

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