



AMERICA'S HEALTHIEST SCHOOLS

A DECADE OF HEALTHIER SCHOOLS IN PINELLAS COUNTY

It was ten years ago that Peggy Johns, former supervisor for pre K-12 health education at Florida's Pinellas County Schools, caught wind of a new, innovative initiative to help school districts prioritize wellness for students and staff from the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. She was intrigued and headed to the Healthy Schools Program website to enroll all of Pinellas County's schools—and the rest, as they say, is history.

Since then, Pinellas County schools have followed the Healthy Schools Program process of starting each school year by completing their Assessment to identify areas for improvement. Schools then address those areas throughout the year using the online Action Plan, which can be tailored to individual school needs and district-wide priorities.

Over the past decade, 25 Pinellas County schools have received Healthier Generation's prestigious National Healthy Schools Award, offered at the Bronze, Silver or Gold level. In 2017 alone, ten schools—the district's most ever in a single year—made the list of America's Healthiest Schools, its long-lasting commitment to ensuring every child in Pinellas County attends a healthy school. Here's a look back at the district's healthy schools journey.

Pinellas County Schools Embark on a Path Toward Health

Beginning in 2009, a Healthy Schools Program Manager began working with Peggy and other Pinellas County wellness leaders at their schools, connecting them with resources, tools and funding opportunities to meet their wellness goals. That same year, the district's first schools were thrilled to earn National Healthy Schools Bronze Awards: Belcher Elementary and Safety Harbor Elementary School.

Fast forward to 2015: Every school in the district had identified a wellness champion to guide its progress and thirteen schools had achieved National Healthy Schools Awards, including the district's first-ever Gold Award for John M. Sexton Elementary School.

Sexton Physical Education Teacher Jenn Velez is proud of what her school accomplished, particularly around improving recess. She created a "grab-and-go recess bag" for each classroom to ensure that teachers had the equipment and knowledge to keep kids moving in a meaningful way.

"I put a sheet of paper on the wall in the teacher's room and asked for feedback about recess. The teachers talked about students' improved behavior and their ability to concentrate when they get back from a physical activity break," said Jenn. "Now, instead of giving a kid a time out, teachers will have students shoot hoops or run laps. They've learned that sometimes what a child really needs is more physical activity."

PINELLAS COUNTY SCHOOLS

45

National Healthy
Schools Awards earned
since 2007

Serving approximately

103K
STUDENTS

ALLIANCE FOR A
HEALTHIER
GENERATION



#HEALTHIESTSCHOOLS

“THIS YEAR OUR SCHOOL SHOWED AN INCREASE in student engagement throughout the day because of healthier meals and more physical activity, which improved student test scores.”

—Brienne Bramlett, Teacher, Maximo Elementary, 2017 National Healthy Schools Bronze Awardee



A New Model to Support Healthy Schools

In November 2015, when Pinellas County schools were poised to sustain their healthy changes, they shifted their model of working with the Healthy Schools Program. Instead of coordinating with a Healthy Schools program manager on the ground in Florida, they began to work with Stephanie Daniel, a virtual program manager.

In place of physically visiting schools, virtual program managers use email and phone calls to support schools in a variety of ways, such as connecting them with resources, funding opportunities and national experts; walking them through the Program’s web-based tools; delivering virtual and on-demand trainings, and answering questions during the Award application process.

In addition to support from Stephanie, Pinellas County also received bi-annual reports from Healthier Generation’s Member Engagement and Support Team (or MEST), which outline schools’ progress on updating their Assessments and completing their Action Plans. These reports have enabled district leadership to better allocate resources, plan for district-wide needs, and meet national and local reporting requirements related to school wellness.

No Slowing Down on the Journey to Healthier Schools

Since the transition, Pinellas County schools haven’t lost any steam. A second virtual program manager, Erin Rasler, has joined Stephanie in supporting schools virtually. Several school and district leaders have attended virtual trainings on applying for the National Healthy Schools Award and in 2016, six schools earned Awards, including two at the Gold level. And this year, ten schools received Awards, including Marjorie Rawlings Elementary at the Gold level.

The district is committed to sustaining the healthy environments that schools have worked so hard to foster, especially given the impact it has seen on school climate and student performance. “The Healthy Schools Program has provided our school with guidelines to create attainable goals for our school to improve its wellness program,” said Brienne Bramlett who teaches at Maximo Elementary, a 2017 National Healthy Schools Bronze Awardee. “This year our school showed an increase in student engagement throughout the day because of healthier meals and more physical activity, which improved student test scores.”