



Success Story

Making Water Flow for Health in Dallas County

Building Communities for Better Health (BCBH) funding (2018-2021) from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) helped increase Dallas County residents' access to free drinking water. In partnership with area schools and the YMCA, the Dallas County Live Well Alliance (DCLWA) used BCBH funding to pay for water bottle filling stations—an especially helpful change during COVID-19.

The Challenge

Water is essential to health. Drinking sufficient amounts of water, instead of sugar-sweetened beverages, has many benefits, including reduced risks of cavities and obesity, and improved student focus in the classroom. Unfortunately, U.S. adults, adolescents, and children do not drink enough water.

The Solution

Initiatives to enhance access to, and promotion of, free, drinkable water, and policies that favor the promotion of water over unhealthy beverages are increasing throughout schools and communities. Since adolescents and children spend a large portion of their day at school, and adults at work, ensuring free, clean, drinking water in these places is an important strategy to increase consumption.

Many people do not drink water from drinking fountains because of water quality and safety concerns,¹ which was especially true during COVID-19. Even willing individuals were unable to drink from a water fountain because they were shut off to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

When water is available, easily accessible, and from non-fountain sources such as filling stations, consumption increases.² Moreover, water access is enhanced when students, in particular, are allowed to carry water bottles.



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The Outcome

In partnership with the DCLWA, DA Mallory Elementary School, Buffalo Prairie Middle School, Buffalo High School, the Dallas County YMCA, and Dallas County Health Department installed water bottle filling stations. The Buffalo Prairie Middle School added three additional filling stations, for a total of four, in prominent places—both main hallways, the cafeteria, and the girls locker room. The YMCA filled a big gap by installing a filling station, as surveys indicated that water was not easily accessible to the many people using the facilities. The same held true for the Dallas County Health Department, which was able to replace its outdated and inoperable water bottle filling station with a new fully functioning one.

Over
2500

Dallas County children and adults now have increased access to free, drinkable water.

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In addition to these environmental changes, students in the Dallas County R-1 School District are encouraged to carry water bottles with them while at school. The increased access to free, drinkable water and the promotion of using water bottles has increased water intake as well as limited germ exposure.

Understandably, a large number of people expressed concerns about the safety of using shared facilities, such as public drinking fountains, in light of COVID-19. As such, the hands-free water bottle filling stations and efforts to encourage students to carry water bottles were even more critical during this time. In an attempt to ensure health and safety, many schools turned off the water fountains during the 2020-2021 school year. The BCBH-funded water bottle filling stations became the only source of free water for Dallas County R-1 School District students, students in programming at Dallas County Area YMCA, and clients of the Dallas County Health Department.



Water bottle filling station installed at Buffalo Prairie Middle School.

What's Next?

The Dallas County R-1 School District, YMCA, and Public Health Department all recognize the value of the water bottle filling stations. While they are self-sufficient, each of these organizations has agreed to maintain and/or replace them at their expense, which will ensure the sustainability of access to free, drinking water for years to come.

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¹ Patel AI, MD, Bogart LM, Uyeda KE, Rabin A, Schuster MA. Perceptions About Availability and Adequacy of Drinking Water in a Large California School District. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2010;7(2):A39.

² Patel AI, Chandran K, Hampton KE, Hecht K, Grumbach JM, Kimura AT, et al. Observations of Drinking Water Access in School Food Service Areas Before Implementation of Federal and State School Water Policy, California, 2011. *Prev Chronic Dis*. 2012; 9:110315.