

# Indiana Healthy Schools Newsletter

January 2025 Edition

## School Success Story

The Indiana Department of Health, Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity (IDOH, DNPA) offers funding through a one-year Youth Adolescent Physical Activity (YAPA) grant. This grant is focused on providing physical activity and physical education opportunities for youth and adolescents, 6-17 years of age (K-12) in the classroom, school, and before or after school program settings in Indiana.

In the 2023-2024 cycle, IDOH, DNPA awarded seven statewide schools and organizations this grant. Garrett Keyser-Butler Community School District (GKB) located in Garrett, IN, population less than 7,000 was one of these awardees.

Garrett Keyser-Butler Community School District utilized funding to provide the [Girls on the Run program](#) that consisted of lessons led by a coach each day. A total of 17 girls in the elementary and middle schools participated.

The program also included a physical activity portion after the classroom lesson. At the end of the program, there was a celebratory 5K run in Fort Wayne, IN for the area groups participating in Girls on the Run.

A few of the essential concepts from the program focused on helping the girls understand themselves, value relationships, and teamwork. It also taught girls how to manage their emotions, make good choices, learn self-acceptance, gratitude, and become empowered.

Additionally, the school district provided yoga and mindfulness classes, and a skate and bike club to their middle school students where they had up to 30 students participate on any given day. Each of these programs engaged youth in unique ways to be physically active. It also taught them how to calm down, learn deep breathing skills, increase flexibility, participate in a safe and inclusive environment, and learn how to be a team player. The school district also purchased new PE equipment for their elementary and middle schools with the funding.

"The skate and bike club was actually proposed from a middle school student to where he compiled the idea to present to the school board for approval. He also created and shared a video of what he envisioned the club to look like," said School Project Aware Coordinator and School Social Worker Renee Hood. "The student suggested and provided input on the equipment that was needed to host the weekly skate club. The students were able to bond physically and socially among different grade levels," said Hood. In addition to the student, the club was also led by a GKB school teacher.

Overall, the three programs offered by the school district were successful and beneficial to all students served in the rural community of Garrett.

For more information on the YAPA grant, please contact Youth Physical Activity Coordinator Emma Smythe at [esmythe@health.in.gov](mailto:esmythe@health.in.gov).



## New DNPA Staff

The Indiana Department of Health, Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity (IDOH, DNPA) has recently added a new team member, Lynlee Swartz.

Lynlee joins DNPA as the new food and health policy manager under the Food is Medicine team. She comes with a diverse set of background expertise. Lynlee earned her Master's in Applied Sociology, focusing on access to food in Indianapolis, from the University of Indianapolis.

She also has a robust background working in technology-based startup companies in central Indiana. Her interests include: disability rights, labor rights, healthcare rights, and housing rights. During the pandemic, she joined a grassroots online patient support group for patients (most of whom developed long COVID) and caretakers. Lynlee joined the board and actively worked to grow the group to 10,000 members globally and form partnerships with influential organizations (such as the National Institute of Health) to make long COVID a recognized chronic illness.

Lynlee is excited to bring her commitment to community health and wellness to the division!

You can email her at [lschwartz@health.in.gov](mailto:lschwartz@health.in.gov).



## Wellness Policies

### Is it time to update your district wellness policy?

All schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program are required to have a district-level school wellness policy to guide school wellness activities and promote student health, wellbeing, and learning ability. Districts are required by the Indiana Department of Education to review the policy at least once every three years. IDOH, DNPA offers free wellness policy reviews using the [WellSAT 3.0](#) scoring tool and technical assistance with policy updates.

**WellSAT: 3.0**

Wellness School Assessment Tool

Please email Jenna Sperry at [jsperry@health.in.gov](mailto:jsperry@health.in.gov) or Emma Smythe at [esmythe@health.in.gov](mailto:esmythe@health.in.gov) for more details.

## Seasonal Affective Disorder

The colder weather is here, and that can mean snow, gloomy skies and Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). This seasonal form of depression affects many adults every year, but it can hit youth and adolescents of all ages as well. Winter-pattern SAD should not be confused with "holiday blues"—feelings of sadness or anxiety brought on by stresses at certain times of the year. The depression associated with SAD is related to changes in daylight hours, not the calendar, so stresses associated with the holidays or predictable seasonal changes in work or school schedules, family visits, and so forth are not the same as SAD.

Why do some people get SAD? Experts aren't certain, but some think that seasonal changes disrupt the circadian rhythm, the 24-hour clock that regulates how we function during sleeping and waking hours, causing us to feel energized and alert sometimes and drowsy at other times. The additional darkness can also lead to an increased level of melatonin, a hormone that regulates sleep patterns which causes lethargy and sleepiness, which contributes to depression. The sun is our best (natural) source of vitamin D; the body creates vitamin D from direct sunlight on the skin when outdoors—spending less time in natural sunlight can result in vitamin D deficiency.

As school administrators and educators, it's important to tune in to your own wellness, but also the students you serve. Providing support and opportunities to address the struggles individuals experience from SAD is vital to making it through the winter months. The following are common SAD signs and symptoms you can look for in your school staff and students: low energy, sluggishness, sleepiness, lack of concentration and focus in the classroom, social withdrawal, and change of mood or behavior.

Ways to improve school staff and students' health and wellness during school hours:

- **Movement:** Whether it's indoors or outdoors, providing the chance for students to participate in play and physical activity by offering recess, classroom brain breaks, and sensory spaces are great ways to do this. If it's not too cold and it's sunny, try taking students outdoors for some fresh air.
- **Social Activities:** Offering before and afterschool programming is an opportunity for students to engage with their peers, provides a safe space to play, and increases their feelings of belongingness and connectedness.
- **Educator Wellness:** Educators who are happy can have a positive impact on students' well-being. They are able to focus their energy on ensuring that the students' needs are met while also modeling healthy behaviors. Check out [IDOH, DNPA's Educator Wellness Toolkit](#).

If you or someone you know is showing symptoms of SAD, talk to a health care provider or a mental health specialist about your concerns. They may have you fill out a questionnaire to determine if your symptoms meet the criteria for SAD.



## Upcoming Events

[Indiana's Educating the Whole Child Summit](#) — Feb. 7 from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. EST at the Embassy Suites Hilton, Plainfield, IN

- Learn from state and national experts (24 different breakout sessions)
- Work interactively with your district team to apply what you learn at the summit
- Gain access to new resources and interventions
- Network with speakers, exhibitors and other school personnel
- Earn Professional Growth Points or Continuing Education Units



[National School Counseling Week](#) — Feb. 3-7

National School Counseling Week focuses on the unique contribution of school counselors within U.S. school systems. The theme this year is *School Counseling: Helping Students Thrive*. National School Counseling Week, sponsored by the American School Counseling Association (ASCA), highlights the tremendous impact school counselors can have in helping students achieve school success and plan for a career.

Use #NSCW25 on your social media posts to share how you will celebrate! ASCA also provides resources and materials on their website.



## America's Healthiest Schools

### Why should schools apply to become a healthy school?

[The Alliance of a Healthier Generation](#) knows schools have worked hard this school year to prioritize the health needs of their students, staff and families, but did you know that could make you one of America's Healthiest Schools? Healthier Generation's prestigious, annual recognition program celebrates schools for implementing best practices to support the physical, mental and social-emotional health needs of the learning community.

Any K-12 public or private school in the United States is eligible to apply for national recognition as one of America's Healthiest Schools. To receive an award, all criteria in a single topic area must be "fully in place" during the 2023-2024 school year. School teams may apply in one, more than one, or in all nine topic areas. During the 2022-2023 school year, a total of 15 Indiana schools were recognized.

Awardees must meet criteria in the [Thriving Schools Integrated Assessment](#), an evidence-informed tool that helps schools identify strengths and opportunities for improving policies and practices to advance health and learning with an integrated approach.

[Click here](#) for more information on how to apply. **Applications are due April 15.**



If you would like more information on school health or have content to share, please contact the Indiana Department of Health, Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity (IDOH, DNPA).

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To **promote**, **protect**, and **improve** the health and safety of all Hoosiers

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