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UTAH HEALTHY SCHOOLS ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS



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As the Utah Healthy Schools Coalition revives and expands its efforts to inspire schools, families and communities to join in the quest for healthy school environments...

...the group set out to conduct research to improve its effectiveness. With the help of a Utah State University student in the Master of Public Health program, multiple sources of research were used to gain insight into what stakeholders perceive is needed to create healthier environments where all kids can perform their best, academically, physically and socially.

The following report conveys the results of this research, along with an analysis of the data and a set of recommendations that were developed based on the findings. Four different sets of data were included in the analysis: a School Health Needs Assessment Survey from 2023, a landscape analysis of similar coalitions and organizations, a focus group, and one in-depth interview.

The research successfully identified areas the coalition can prioritize to grow its mission. Utilizing these insights is key to streamlining efforts and providing resources and support where it's most needed. By optimizing the coalition's work, Utah's children will be able to learn and grow in ways that enable them to develop healthy habits that will help them thrive now and well into the future.

INTRODUCTION

SURVEY RESULTS

A School Health Needs Assessment Survey was conducted in 2023...

...with 225 responses and 96 participants completing the survey. Questions were aimed at identifying what parents, teachers, administrators and other school staff believe to be the most important strategies for creating healthy school environments. The data below shows the top three highest rated strategies for each health category and the five most commonly identified barriers to implementing them.

	Nutrition Strategies	PA Strategies	MH Strategies
Top Rated Strategies	Incorporate more local foods for school meals	Fundraising/other help for acquiring equipment	Work with community partners to increase access to mental health services
	Incorporate nutrition education into math and science	Professional development for recess staff	Provide mental health screening for students
	Provide time for a fruit or veggie snack between mealtimes	Incorporate physically active classroom activities	Provide students with age-appropriate mental health education
	⌵	⌵	⌵
Barriers	• Lack of financial resources • Unaware of programs • Supply chain issues • Too many demands on teachers • Too many demands on admins	• Lack of financial resources • Too many demands on teachers • Too many demands on admins • Lack of educational materials • Lack of space/access	• Lack of financial resources • Too many demands on teachers • Too many demands on admins • Lack of parent involvement • Lack of counselors

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

A Google search for similar U.S. coalitions with a focus on healthy schools was conducted. Activities of the 17 coalitions found in the search were compiled into the following categories.



Resources

- Following wellness policy guidelines (templates, guides)
- School gardening
- Local food sources
- The WSCC model
- Grants/funding opportunities for schools
- Integrating food education into curriculum Integrating PA into the day
- Ideas for recess



Leadership

- Wellness Policy Committee (school or district level)
- Wellness Policy Coordinator (school or county level)
- Wellness Facilitator
- School Equity Committee
- School Health “Champions”



Advocacy & Policy

- Letters to legislators
- Form relationships
- Create resources for advocacy
- Petitions



Recognition

- “Champion Schools” program
- Physical Activity assessment with “grades”
- School Food Environment assessments
- “Healthy School” designation



Outreach

- Monthly newsletter to stakeholders
- Social media
- Maintain an Events page on website
- Write articles on school success stories, including student voices
- Short surveys for other organizations, teachers, school staff, parents



Operations

- Form Action Teams for each area of concern
- Form a Membership Task Force to increase membership
- Rotate hosting of meetings
- Implement member survey for concerns/ideas
- “Member Spotlights”

FOCUS GROUP/INTERVIEW

To gain insight into what resources schools feel they need, three focus groups were planned: a Teacher/staff group, a Parent group, and an Administrator group. The following is an overview of the study with a description of the study parameters.



2 Teachers
1 School Nurse
1 School Nurse Supervisor
1 District Administrator

School districts represented in the study include Iron County, Salt Lake City, Davis County, and Alpine.

OVERVIEW

Methods

Participants were recruited through email based on their response to a survey question gauging their interest in participating in a future focus group. Sessions were held online through the Zoom video conferencing platform, and participants were offered a \$10 Amazon gift card as an incentive.

Data Collection

All sessions were recorded through Zoom and transcribed manually using Microsoft Word by Lisa Starkey, MPH. The names of the participants were removed during transcription to protect their identities. Participants were asked to share their thoughts on the strategies rated in the School Health Needs Assessment survey. The two sessions were limited to about 60 minutes. Not all questions were asked due to time running out.

Analysis

Transcripts were edited, coded and analyzed directly in Microsoft Word. Codes included Successes, Barriers and Challenges, which were applied to each of the three focus areas: Nutrition, PA/Recess, and Mental Health. Common themes were revealed and incorporated into the final analysis and recommendations.

- * Limitations for this study include a small rate of participation of less than 5%, possibly due to the timing of the focus groups over Spring break.

CODEBOOK

The following is a portion of the codebook created from the focus group data during the analysis stage. Codes were applied to each area of focus and consisted of Successes, Challenges and Barriers.

Nutrition Successes

“
I think one of the things our school is doing really well is we have this fruit and veggies snack program, which twice a week we get fresh fruits and vegetables delivered to all the classes.”

Nutrition Barriers

“
I get why that's highly rated [incorporating nutrition education], but there's also the piece where that would be asking teachers and others to take on the lift of creating those cross-curricular connections.”

Physical Activity & Recess Successes

“
So that school that I was talking about actually just raised \$15,000 so they could get the swings put in, and they did it through [PTA] read-a-thons.”

Physical Activity & Recess Barriers

“
I would just throw in one plug for Playworks. As an organization it does a great job, obviously, but there has to be ways that we can get structured play out into schools that are not cost prohibitive.”

Mental Health Successes

“
So I work very heavily with Davis Behavioral Health and we implement classes through them in our after-school programs and at night for our parents to attend...I've created some relationships...”

Mental Health Challenges

“
And so I feel like there's gotta be a better way to get information to parents, to let them know that these things [mental health resources] are out there. And I honestly don't know how to do it.”

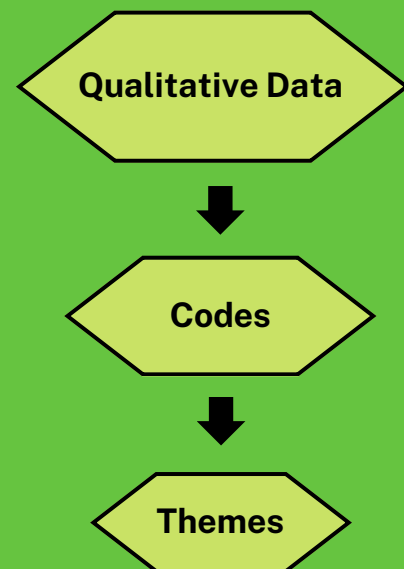
THEMES

Qualitative data from the focus group and interview was analyzed and relevant codes were created. Combining the findings with results of the survey and landscape analysis revealed five common themes for each topic of Nutrition, Physical Activity & Recess, and Mental Health.



Nutrition Themes

- Sourcing Nutritious Food (ie., pantries, fruit and veggie snacks, local foods/gardens)
- Funding for Healthier Food Options
- Materials to Incorporate Nutrition Into Curriculum
- Structuring the Day to Incorporate Breakfast and Lunch
- Relationships With Community Organizations



PA/Recess Themes

- Structured Activities for Recess
- Funding for Programs Related to PA and Recess (ie., Playworks, Active Start)
- Need for FTE PE Staff
- Creative Use of Space for Activities
- Professional Development for Recess Staff



Mental Health Themes

- Need for Counselors
- Parents' Lack of Interest or Involvement
- Lack of Awareness of Programs Available
- Relationships With Community Organizations
- Connection Between Mental and Physical Health

From the 15 themes found in the research, 10 recommendations were made for the coalition. Implementing these strategies will accelerate the group's mission to mobilize action toward healthier school environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 01.** Provide resources on how schools can raise funds. Include a list of grants.
- 02.** Provide resources on ways to incorporate nutrition into math and science education.
- 03.** Provide resources on structured activities for recess.
- 04.** Provide resources on local food sources, how to incorporate nutritious foods, and food pantries.
- 05.** Raise awareness about available/existing programs that parents and teachers may not know about.
- 06.** Find ways to increase parental interest/involvement.
- 07.** Advocate for full-time PE and/or recess staff.
- 08.** Promote community relationships/partnerships, especially to boost mental health offerings and nutrition education.
- 09.** Promote/provide resources on the connection between mental and physical health.
- 010.** Communication – Include short polls/surveys, “did you know?” video clips, and legislature updates in a monthly newsletter, and ensure emails are sent to Wellness Coordinators when possible.