

Obesity causes or exacerbates numerous chronic diseases and conditions that can lead to death, including diabetes and hypertension. In an effort to address the obesity epidemic in Arkansas — which affects more than one-third of adults in our state — the governor-led Healthy Active Arkansas (HAA) initiative provides a 10-year framework with phased goals to increase the percentage of Arkansans who are at a healthy weight. The HAA plan is comprised of nine priority areas in which individuals and communities can take action to encourage and enable healthier lifestyles. Supported by funding from the Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas, the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement convened 10 statewide learning network meetings beginning in 2017 to engage, recruit, and activate a network of local champions to assist in meeting these goals. This study is part of a series of case studies highlighting success stories from the HAA Statewide Learning Network. Visit achi.net for more resources, including additional case studies and a template for creating your own action plan for your community.

HEALTHY ACTIVE ARKANSAS STATEWIDE LEARNING NETWORK

During the first year of the learning network, the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement (ACHI) hosted meetings in Jonesboro, McGehee, Little Rock, Clarksville, and Magnolia. In an effort to reach other areas of the state and expand the learning network, ACHI held an additional five meetings in Springdale, Mountain Home, Hot Springs, El Dorado, and Helena-West Helena in 2018. In total, over 460 city and county officials, hospital executives, superintendents, college administrators, community advocates, and others joined the HAA Statewide Learning Network to make their communities healthier and more active places to live, work, and play. Network members developed more than 175 action plans to create change in at least one of the nine priority areas. Each action plan identified strategies and key partners necessary to reach the desired outcome, as well as potential barriers.

At the learning network meeting in Springdale, Allison Montiel, the community health education coordinator for Mercy Hospital, discussed an innovative partnership between Mercy Hospital Fort Smith and the Future School of Fort Smith (“Future School”). This partnership, a health class developed and taught by Montiel to students at Future School, addressed the following HAA priority areas:

- Priority 1: Physical and built environment;
- Priority 3: Nutritional standards in schools — early child care through college;
- Priority 4: Physical education and activity in schools — early child care through college;
- Priority 6: Access to healthy foods;
- Priority 7: Sugar-sweetened beverage reduction; and
- Priority 9: Marketing program.

HEALTH LITERACY FOR SMART PEOPLE

While serving in her role as the Mercy Hospital Fort Smith community health education coordinator, Montiel used her experience in education and healthcare to teach high school students the importance of fostering healthy habits early on. Using the HAA framework, Montiel created a curriculum that exposed the students to healthy activities and life skills, including yoga, meditation, shopping for healthy foods, and reading nutrition labels. She named her class Health Literacy for Smart People.¹

Incorporating her goal to improve healthy habits among students and HAA’s Rethink Your Drink Educational Campaign Toolkit, Montiel developed coursework to give students real life experience in promoting healthy behaviors and grant writing using the See One, Do One, Teach One model. This model allows students to watch how an activity is completed, execute the activity, and then teach other students how to do the activity.

Students were divided into two teams with different tasks. The first team was tasked with developing a curriculum to teach fifth graders at Howard Elementary in Fort Smith the importance of healthy eating and drinking water. Students found creative ways to engage fifth graders by tying in their interests, such as the popular Fortnite game, to encourage them to drink more water and understand the benefits of drinking water.

The second team was responsible for drafting and submitting grant proposals to replace water fountains at Future School and Howard Elementary. Students submitted two grant proposals to the HAA 2018 Rethink Your Drink: Choose Water grant program totaling approximately \$5,000 to replace five water fountains — two at Future School and three at Howard Elementary. Of the five requested, the students were awarded one water fountain replacement at Howard Elementary.



High school students teach fifth graders about the importance of drinking water.

NEXT STEPS

Encouraged by the success of Health Literacy for Smart People, Montiel — who since giving her presentation at the learning network meeting has become the principal of the Future School — hopes to continue the class. Future School is also planning to submit another grant proposal for a water fountain replacement during the 2019 Rethink Your Drink: Choose Water grant cycle.

MERCY HOSPITAL FORT SMITH

Mercy Hospital Fort Smith, part of the nonprofit Mercy health system, is a 336-bed acute care hospital located in Fort Smith. The hospital has been an integral part of the community since 1905, when it was founded as St. Edward's Infirmary.

FUTURE SCHOOL OF FORT SMITH

Future School of Fort Smith is a tuition-free, open-enrollment 10th-through-12th-grade public charter school in Fort Smith. The mission of the school is to “relentlessly empower students to shape their future and community through engaging them in educational real-world experiences.” Future School is committed to the success of its students and provides students with collaborative, real-life experiences through its project-based classrooms, real-world internships, and cross-sector partnerships with K-12 educators, higher education, businesses, and community organizations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Healthy Active Arkansas: <https://healthyactive.org/>
- Future School of Fort Smith: <https://fsfuture.org/>
- Mercy Hospital Fort Smith: <https://www.mercy.net/practice/mercy-hospital-fort-smith/>

REFERENCES

¹ Golden, A. (18 February, 2018). Mercy Fort Smith, Future School partner on health class. *Times Record*. Retrieved from <http://www.swtimes.com/news/20180218/mercy-fort-smith-future-school-partner-on-health-class>

Note: This case study includes information provided by Allison Montiel, Principal of the Future School of Fort Smith. ACHI received written permission to use this information. Additional information was gathered from the Future School of Fort Smith and Mercy Hospital websites.