



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
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Y Youth Wellness Program
Arellanes Elementary Healthy Behaviors Learning Center

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Site Background

The Arellanes Elementary afterschool program has been operated by the YMCA of Santa Maria Valley under a state-funded After School Education and Safety (ASES) grant for eight years, serving 65 children daily who are mainly from a Hispanic/Latino background. Our mission statement is “Healthy Youth Start Here.” We offer this program during our Summer Camp at the Santa Maria Valley YMCA.

The Arellanes Elementary School is located in the southwestern region outside of the Santa Maria Valley and serves students in kindergarten through sixth grade following a modified year-round calendar. At the beginning of the 2014-15 school year, 277 students were enrolled in the school, including 88 percent qualifying for free or reduced price meals, 64 percent qualifying for English Language Learner support and 10 percent in special education.

The afterschool staff are Hispanic/Latino and Caucasian.

The site operates Monday through Friday from 2:15-6:00 pm

Making a Difference

The Y Youth Wellness program began at Arellanes Elementary, our Healthy Behaviors Learning Center. This school is located in a small town, named Tanglewood, considered a food desert, where there is a high need for this program. Currently, the Youth Wellness Program serves over 65 children, not including the families that are also affected by this program.

To strengthen physical activity, we have implemented circuit training, accompanied by music. Staff are active participants in student-led activities, which include jump rope and yoga. We also implemented the Walk Across America program with all students tracking their progress each day. Physical activity breaks are included in every class.

We offer daily nutrition education, using the YMCA curriculum and supplemented with other materials including MyPlate. Healthy cooking classes are now hands-on and student-led. Students are eager to take their healthy recipes home. Students track and

record the number of fruits and vegetables they consume and post totals each day for everyone to see! The increase in the availability of fresh produce has been significant.

Families are encouraged to participate in our after school cooking projects and help in our garden where we empower families to take gardening skills they've learned home and practice healthy living and eating. We welcome their participation in any type of physical activity the program hosts on a daily basis.

We now supplement the snack program with the federally-subsidized meal program, which provides hot meals. The snack program is provided by the district, while the meal program is provided by an outside vendor. All our students participate in the free school breakfast and lunch programs.

What We Do

Our staff has changed their eating habits and physical activity because of this program. They are healthy lifestyle role models! They started their own softball league, lost weight and eat healthier in front of the kids. They incorporate physical activity every chance they get. They do physical activity breaks during classes—students do activities like yoga, jumping jacks, and stretches by their desks. Students love to do movements during transitions called “line walking exercises.”

We have sent our staff to a Y national training called Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA). They received and still receive many different resources to help with nutrition education. Our staff also use MyPlate resources.

We create and maintain strong family connections; encouraging our families to adopt healthy lifestyles. Our program informs our families about CalFresh, our local food bank, farmers markets, and WIC. We have a designated area for parents to take home information about these and other community resources, and it is kept current. We have also incorporated healthy family nights and Zumba classes that are well attended.

We have overcome challenges such as staff turnover and funding. We managed staff turnover by training every new employee on the initiative and ensuring the right match of their skills and commitment to healthy eating and physical activity. The Santa Maria Valley YMCA and volunteers raise financial aid dollars every year to augment non self-supporting programs such as the Healthy Behaviors Initiative (HBI). The board has fully endorsed the support of HBI through these funds. The Y has also written separate grants to assist in initial costs of on-site gardens and kitchens.

Our Partners

The partners who have contributed to our changes are the Center for Collaborative Solutions, Boni Pak, North County Volunteer Corps, the Santa Maria Bonita School District and Santa Maria Food Bank. In the next few years, we will expand this program into all 21 ASES sites, which will include the Boys and Girls Club and Recreation and Parks run ASES sites.

Currently we are funded by the Santa Maria Valley YMCA Annual Community support campaign. We have received in-kind contributions from Boni Pak; this generous company provides our afterschool program with vegetables every month. North County

Volunteer Corps has provided weekly volunteers who have helped with staffing and tutoring our students on healthy behaviors.

Our YMCA van prominently displays *Healthy Behaviors Initiative* and *Health Happens Here* for the whole community to see. We even had one of our childcare vans professionally covered with "Healthy Behaviors Start Here" and fresh fruits and vegetables displayed with the Y logo.

Additional Impacts of Our Program

We have had many additional successes in our program at Arellanes. Students want to stay, and parents stay to watch as well. Families have shared that their children will not allow them to buy soda because it has too much sugar and that water is a healthier option. Students love the cooking projects, which we do towards the end of the day. We always invite parents to come help and do taste tests with the kids. We have parents who come, stay and do the taste tests with students.

Overall, our program has had many positive impacts, and we look forward to having even more as our program grows and spreads to other sites.

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