



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES  
Nutritional Sciences  
& Wellness



# FY25 Evaluation Report

*Harvesting Outcomes from Five Years of SNAP-Ed*



## LOCAL IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES



## Authors & Contributors

Theresa LeGros, MA *Author (Childhood, Adult), Design*  
Anvi Bhakta, MS *Author (Food Systems, Active Living, Youth)*  
Deshawna Yazzie, MPH *Author (Tribal)*  
Gregory Goodman, MS *Data Analyst*  
Beatriz Reyna *Reviewer*  
Mollie Silva *Data Entry*  
Laurel Jacobs, DrPH, MPH *Editor*

# Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1:  Active Living</b>	<b>1</b>
Outcome Harvest: Active Transportation in Yavapai County	4
<b>Chapter 2:  Food Systems</b>	<b>7</b>
Outcome Harvest: Food Access in Pima County	10
<b>Chapter 3:  Tribal-Serving Programs</b>	<b>16</b>
Outcome Harvest: School Wellness & Food Sovereignty in Coconino County	18
<b>Chapter 4:  ECE Systems</b>	<b>22</b>
Outcome Harvest: ECE Providers' Policies & Practices in Yuma County	25
<b>Chapter 5:  School Systems</b>	<b>28</b>
Outcome Harvest: School Health Supports in Maricopa County	31
Outcome Harvest: School Gardens in Greenlee County	34
<b>Chapter 6: Individual Focus</b>	<b>36</b>
 <b>Youth</b>	<b>37</b>
 <b>Adults</b>	<b>38</b>
Outcome Harvest: Around the Table Classes in Maricopa County	39

## Common Acronyms

<b>ADHS</b>	Arizona Department of Health Services
<b>ATT</b>	<i>Around the Table</i> Curriculum
<b>AZHZ</b>	AZ Health Zone
<b>CEP</b>	Community Eligibility Provision
<b>DIG</b>	Developing Integrated Gardens
<b>DUFB</b>	Double Up Food Bucks
<b>ECE</b>	Early Care & Education
<b>FCCHS</b>	Family Child Care Homes
<b>FMNP</b>	Farmers Market Nutrition Program
<b>FY</b>	Fiscal Year (October 1 <sup>st</sup> -September 30 <sup>th</sup> )
<b>Go NAPSACC</b>	Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care
<b>HFPAT</b>	Healthy Food Pantry Assessment Tool
<b>KAN-Q</b>	Kids' Activity & Nutrition Questionnaire
<b>LIA</b>	Local Implementing Agency
<b>LWP</b>	Local Wellness Policies
<b>PA</b>	Physical Activity
<b>PAR</b>	Physical Activity Resources
<b>PARA</b>	Physical Activity Resource Assessment
<b>PSE</b>	Policy, Systems, & Environment
<b>SEEDS</b>	SNAP-Ed Electronic Data System
<b>SET</b>	AZ Health Zone State Evaluation Team
<b>SIT</b>	AZ Health Zone State Implementation Team
<b>SLM</b>	Smarter Lunchrooms Movement
<b>SNAP</b>	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
<b>SNAP-Ed</b>	SNAP-Education
<b>SPAN</b>	State Physical Activity & Nutrition Program
<b>STORE</b>	Store Tracker for Opportunities in the Retail Environment
<b>USDA</b>	United States Department of Agriculture
<b>WALC</b>	Walk Audit for Livable Communities
<b>WIC</b>	Women, Infants and Children
<b>WellSAT</b>	Wellness School Assessment Tool

## Acknowledgements

We thank the AZ Health Zone for supporting this FY25 evaluation:

**Cristina Konnecke, AZ Health Zone Administrator**

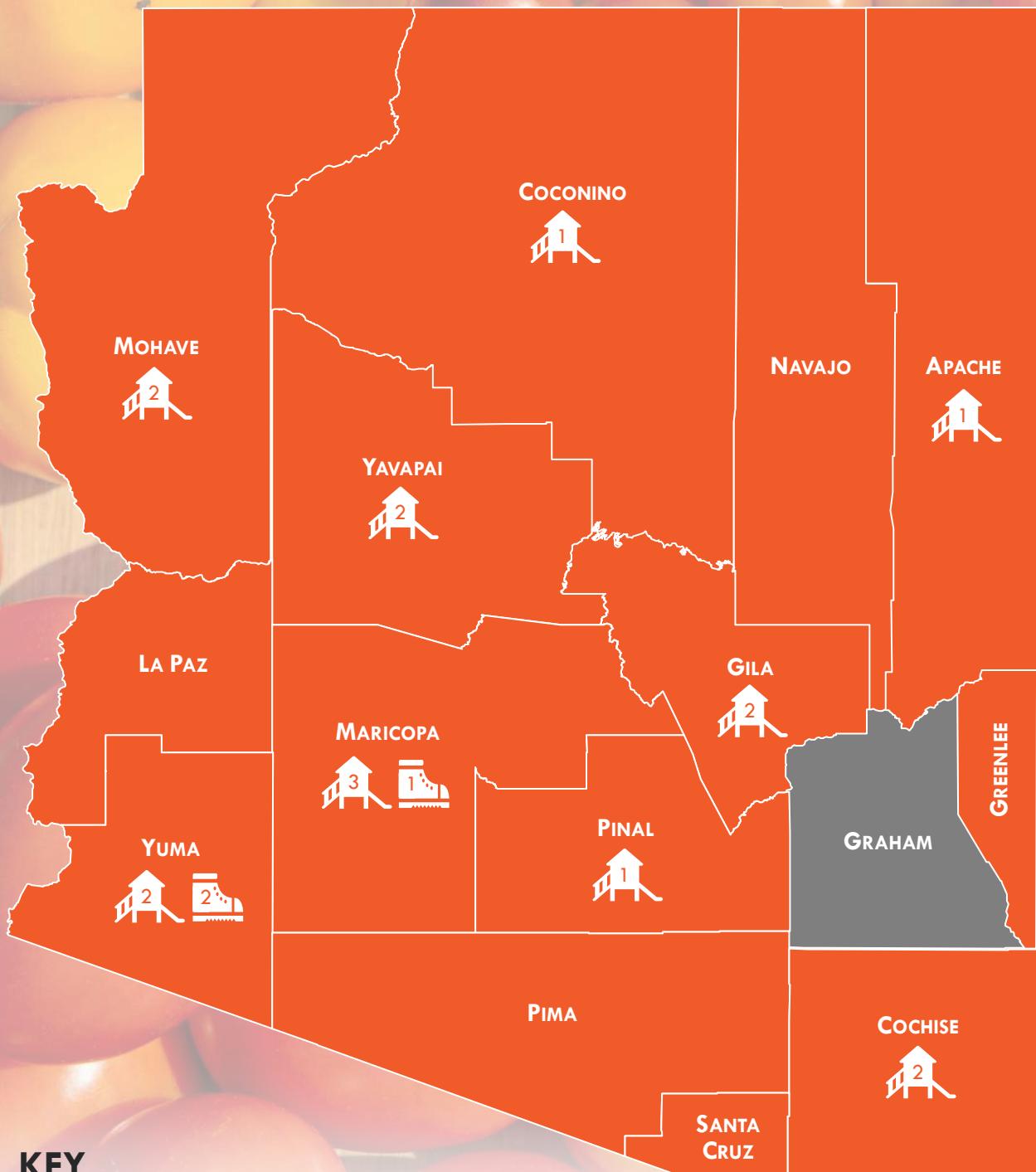
Melisha Alhambra, *Early Childhood Specialist*  
Jennie Altman, *Community Program Manager*  
Roel Ayala, *Local Agency Liaison*  
Micaryn Begay, *Tribal Liaison*  
Kathryn Faull, *School Systems Specialist*  
Andrea Golfen, *Community Engagement Specialist*  
Therese Neal, *Operations Manager*

Erin Raczyński, *Office Chief, Community Innovations*  
Jaclyn Rybin, *Food Systems Specialist*  
Savannah Sandlin, *Community Nutrition Specialist*  
Patrick Shea, *Communications Administrator*  
Rebecca Stowell, *Operations & Finance Liaison*  
Bianca Valenzuela, *Program Integrity Liaison*  
Jacques Watson, *Active Living Specialist*



# Active Living

Increase usability of and access to physical activity (PA) resources and community programming **and** support development of the built environment to increase access to and use of community infrastructure(s)



## KEY



= # matched PARs, 10/1/20 – 5/30/25



= # WALCs submitted, 10/1/24 – 7/1/25

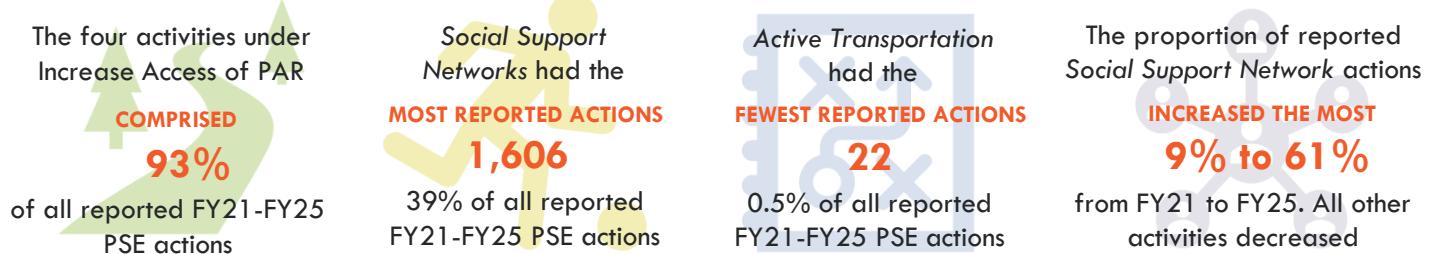


= did NOT work in Active Living during the FY21-25 program cycle



# Active Living Activity Patterns

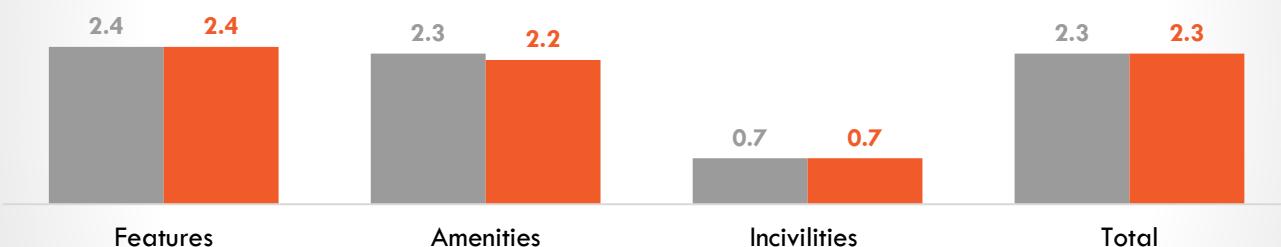
From FY21-25 (10/1/20–4/30/25), Local Implementing Agencies (LIAs) used SEEDS to report their program actions for two strategies under Active Living: Increase Access and Usability of Physical Activity Resources (PAR) and Built Environment. Of the AZ Health Zone's nine Active Living activities:



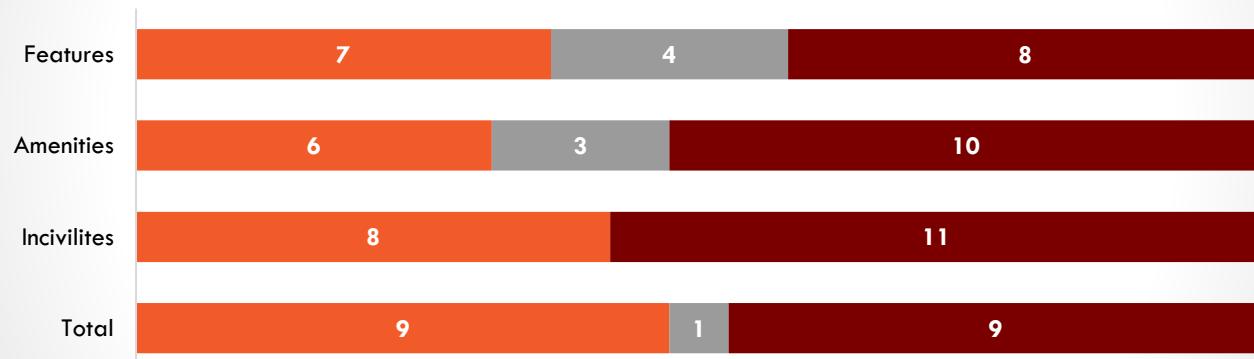
## FY21-25 PARA Findings

We used the **Physical Activity Resource Assessment (PARA)** to assess the Features (equipment), Amenities (nice-to-have comforts), and Incivilities (things to reduce or eliminate) at parks and trails. The confidence level for this evaluation was set at 90% ( $p \leq 0.10$ ) due to the small sample size ( $n=19$ ).

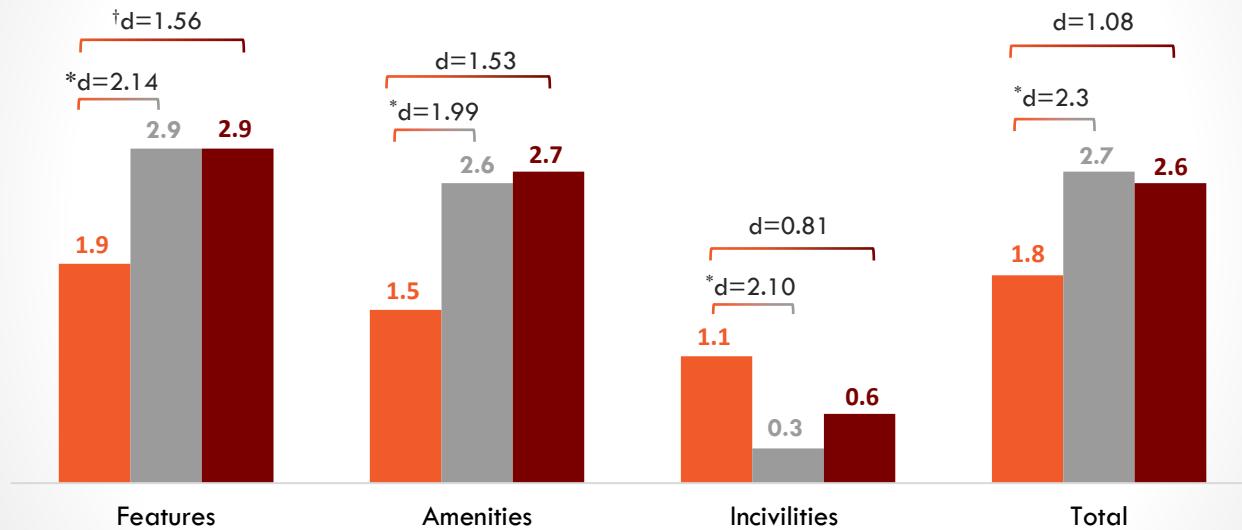
**Mean total PARA scores did not change from PRE to POST ( $n=19$ ).** Features and Amenities scores ranged from 1 (worst) to 3 (best). Incivilities scores ranged from 0 (best) to 3 (worst).



**From pre to post, the number of physical activity resources with reported IMPROVEMENTS, NO CHANGES, and DECLINES to their PARA section scores were mixed ( $n=19$ ).** A decline in incivilities reflects the number of parks that showed improved scores. This variation demonstrates why the mean total PARA scores remained unchanged.



Compared to their **URBAN (n=6)** counterparts, parks in **TOWNS (n=4)** and **RURAL (n=2)** areas had higher mean **Features** and **Amenities** scores and a lower **Incivilities** score with large effect sizes. Features and Amenities scores ranged from 1 (worst) to 3 (best). Incivilites scores ranged from 0 (best) to 3 (worst).



<sup>†</sup>p≤0.10, \*p≤0.05

## FY25 WALC Findings

We used the **Walk Audit for Livable Communities (WALC)** to assess the safety and accessibility of walking routes commonly used by residents. In FY25, four LIA sites in three counties used the tool for the first time to assess neighborhood routes. LIAs reported conducting the WALC with county supervisors, school staff, parents, students, and community residents. The scores below are calculated as percents of the maximum score (out of 100%).

**SIDEWALKS.** Scores ranged from 40% to 87%, where LIAs noted disconnected, narrow, and/or lifted sidewalks.

MEAN SCORE  
60%

**STREET CROSSINGS.** Scores ranged from 24% to 94% where LIAs noted a lack of crosswalks and/or pedestrian-crossing signals.

MEAN SCORE  
48%

**BICYCLE SAFETY.** Scores ranged from 0% to 33% where LIAs noted a lack of marked bicycle lanes and/or signage.

MEAN SCORE  
11%

**PEDESTRIAN SAFETY.** Scores ranged from 17% to 89% where LIAs noted a lack of speed limit signs and/or light fixtures.

MEAN SCORE  
59%

**DRIVER BEHAVIOR.** Scores ranged from 58% to 75% where LIAs noted speeding drivers.

MEAN SCORE  
65%

**COMFORT & APPEARANCE.** Scores ranged from 17% to 50% where LIAs noted litter and/or a lack of shade infrastructure.

MEAN SCORE  
28%

## AZ Health Zone Yavapai Makes Strides Towards Active Transportation in Rural Communities

This program cycle, the AZ Health Zone Yavapai, funded through Yavapai County Community Health Services, (YCCHS) chaired the Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC). The BAC is a cross-disciplinary group that advances active transportation initiatives throughout the City of Cottonwood and the Town of Clarkdale, referred to as the Verde Valley. We asked: (1) In what ways has AZ Health Zone YCCHS support impacted the BAC in making active

transportation- related policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes during this program cycle and (2) How has their involvement in the BAC influenced the development of cross-sector partnerships aimed at promoting active transportation? The three harvested outcomes demonstrate how AZ Health Zone YCCHS prioritized capacity and relationship-building to support the BAC.

**Outcome.** AZ Health Zone YCCHS's capacity-building efforts strengthened the BAC's ability to advocate for and advance changes that support safer, more connected multimodal transportation environments.

**Description.** Capacity building from AZ Health Zone YCCHS enabled the BAC to facilitate the creation of new bike lanes, improve bike signage, install bike racks, and contribute to the integration of active transportation into broader development efforts across the Verde Valley. This includes being a regular voice at municipal/regional transportation planning meetings and working with government officials to integrate bicycle-centered initiatives into the City of Cottonwood's General Plan. These efforts culminated in a collaborative application to League of American Bicyclists, where the City of Cottonwood was awarded Silver Status as a bicycle friendly community.

**Contribution.** An active partner since 2012, AZ Health Zone YCCHS significantly increased the BAC's capacity to advance bike-centered strategies through:



**Education.** AZ Health Zone YCCHS provided the BAC with educational resources and best practice guidelines related to active transportation and health. This helped BAC members become more informed about infrastructure that supports physical activity and well-being.



**Data Support.** AZ Health Zone YCCHS supported the BAC with data collection and research that informed transportation planning and decision-making. This data support helped the BAC identify infrastructure gaps related to bike safety and equitable access to physical activity.



**Funding.** AZ Health Zone YCCHS helped the BAC secure two American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) grants: one to fund a safe bicycling route that connected communities across the Verde Valley, and the other to conduct 13 bike audits where community input around active transportation infrastructure was collected.

**Significance:** Through capacity building, AZ Health Zone YCCHS supported the BAC in advancing infrastructure improvements and incorporating active transportation priorities into long-term plans that shape how communities develop. These environmental and policy changes normalize and expand access to biking as a safe mode of transportation.



BAC members discuss priorities for the Cottonwood General Plan.

**Outcome.** With support from AZ Health Zone YCCHS, the BAC expanded its community engagement and awareness efforts. This led to stronger resident support and increased visibility of bike initiatives throughout the Verde Valley.

**Description.** The BAC expanded their community outreach, building stronger community support and awareness for safe active transportation across the Verde Valley. These efforts helped encourage resident attendance at BAC meetings and ensured that local voices were regularly captured in discussions about multimodal needs in the community.

**Contribution.** AZ Health Zone YCCHS facilitated community engagement efforts to ensure the BAC's efforts reflected the needs of residents around inclusive and accessible active transportation infrastructure. To further raise awareness of bike initiatives and deepen resident outreach, AZ Health Zone YCCHS supported the planning and implementation of Bike Month. Events during Bike Month included Bike-to-School Days, Walk-to-School Days, and Bike Rodeos. These events drew community residents together to highlight active transportation strengths and gaps across the Verde Valley. Building on this momentum, an annual "Community Ride with the Mayor Day" was launched during Bike Month in FY25. This gave residents a unique opportunity to share their concerns directly with a local official. AZ Health Zone YCCHS also supported the sustainability of Bike Month by encouraging all BAC members to take ownership of the events and contribute to the planning processes.

**"Bike Month is huge. It's a great example of the way that [AZ Health Zone] and the BAC are trying to bring more education, awareness, and safety into public conversation."**

**-BAC Member**



**Significance.** Due to resident outreach and relationship-building support from AZ Health Zone YCCHS, the BAC has emerged as a trusted point of contact throughout the community. Residents now regularly turn to the BAC and attend meetings to share concerns, ideas, and feedback related to biking and walking. This has ensured that community voice is involved in the planning of active transportation improvements across the Verde Valley.

**"Almost every meeting we have somebody new from the community coming in to be a part of the conversation. The bike month activities that we put together as a team were highly inspiring and it brings the community out. It was great to see that."**

**-BAC Member**

**Outcome.** Through their relationship-building efforts, AZ Health Zone YCCHS fostered a collaborative environment where government, transportation, and public health agencies advanced active transportation initiatives within the BAC.

**Description.** AZ Health Zone YCCHS built strong cross-sector partnerships that were crucial in aligning planning priorities and implementing active transportation infrastructure.

**Contribution.** After assuming leadership of the BAC in FY23, AZ Health Zone YCCHS broadened the scope of its support beyond the City of Cottonwood to include the surrounding communities of the Verde Valley. This expanded their geographic footprint in the region and opened the door for more partnerships. As a result, AZ Health Zone YCCHS helped the BAC foster a network of cross-sector partnerships including state and regional transportation planning agencies, parks and recreation departments, county supervisors, city and town officials, and community groups. These efforts have strengthened coordination between partners and have helped align transportation planning with public health goals to collectively improve active transportation infrastructure. Notably:



The Arizona Department of Transportation and the BAC worked together to add a large gutter pan and white stripes along a high-traffic road, increasing safety for cyclists. The City of Cottonwood also conducted a safety survey along the same corridor.



The City of Cottonwood and the Town of Clarkdale collaborated with the BAC to improve the continuity of bike lanes, called the Verde Connection, between the municipalities.



The City of Cottonwood partnered with the BAC to place new bike safety signage and repair stations across the city.

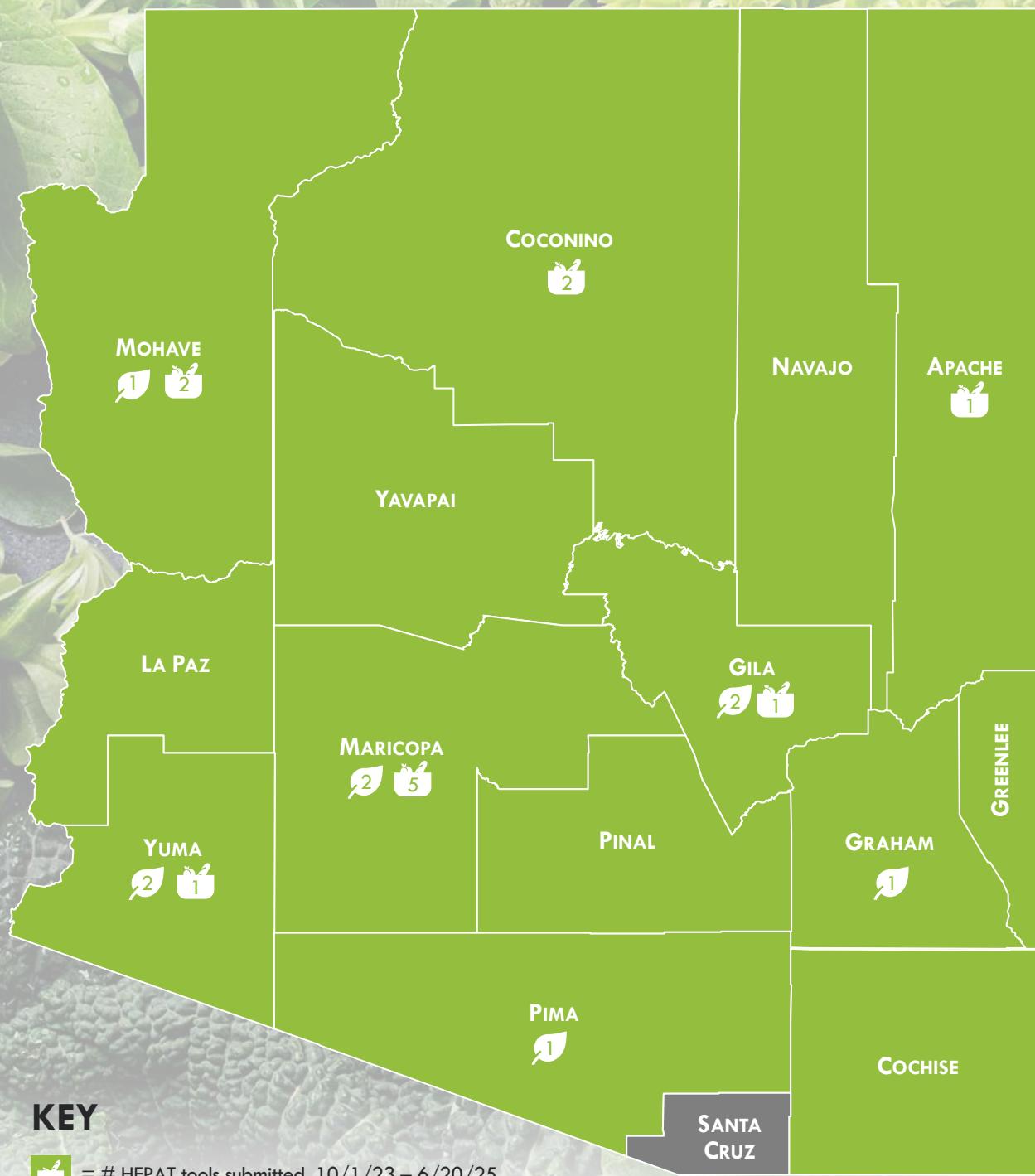
**“[AZ Health Zone] is always trying to get everybody at the table. [Being part of the BAC], we are a part of something bigger, and it has inspired us to really look at what our communities need.”**

**-BAC Member**

**Significance.** Changes to the built environment requires collaboration across multiple sectors, a common barrier in SNAP-Ed work due to its complex and time-intensive process. The cross-sector partnerships cultivated by AZ Health Zone YCCHS through the BAC have bridged previously siloed organizations to work towards common goals. By linking active transportation to improved public health outcomes, AZ Health Zone YCCHS has helped highlight multimodal initiatives as a shared community priority.

# Food Systems

Support the production, distribution, and availability of food to increase access to and consumption of healthy foods



## KEY

-  = # HFPAT tools submitted, 10/1/23 – 6/20/25
-  = # DIG in Community tools submitted, 10/1/24 – 7/21/25
-  = did NOT work Food Systems during the FY21-25 program cycle

# Food Systems Activity Patterns

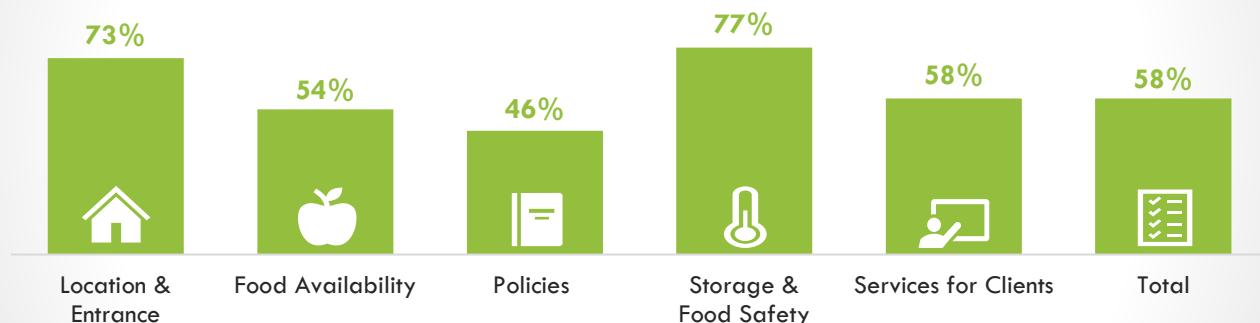
From FY21-25 (10/1/20 – 4/30/25), Local Implementing Agencies (LIAs) reported their unduplicated policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) actions in SEEDS. Of the AZ Health Zone's six Food Systems Activities:

Community Gardens had the <b>MOST REPORTED ACTIONS</b> <b>1,976</b> 38% of all reported FY21-FY25 PSE actions	Farmers & Growers had the <b>FEWEST REPORTED ACTIONS</b> <b>219</b> 4% of all reported FY21-FY25 PSE actions	The proportion of reported Community Gardens actions <b>INCREASED THE MOST</b> <b>28% to 47%</b> from FY21-FY25, followed by Food Retail (6% to 11%)	The proportion of reported Community Engagement actions <b>DECREASED THE MOST</b> <b>30% to 16%</b> from FY21-FY25, followed by Farmers (5% to 0%)
---	--	--	--

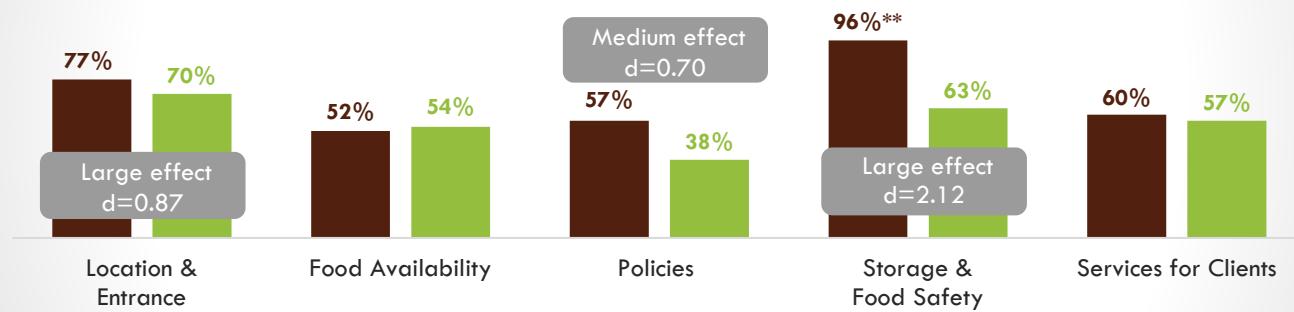
## FY24-25 HFPAT Findings

We first used the **HEALTHY FOOD PANTRY ASSESSMENT TOOL (HFPAT)** in 2024 to provide a snapshot of a food distribution environment (e.g., a food bank or food pantry) based on conditions observed on the day of the assessment. The confidence level for this evaluation was set at 90% ( $p \leq 0.10$ ) due to the small sample size ( $n=12$ ).

Between FY24-25, overall food distributor HFPAT mean scores were highest for **Storage & Food Safety** and lowest for **Policies** ( $n=12$ ). Scores represent the % of the maximum possible score (out of 100%).



Mean sectional scores were generally higher for **FOOD BANKS** ( $n=5$ ) than **FOOD PANTRIES** ( $n=7$ ). The difference in scores may point to the unique structural and operational differences between each distribution model. Scores represent the % of the maximum possible score (out of 100%).



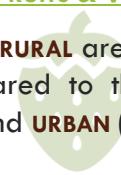
\*\* $p \leq 0.01$

## Food Availability by Geography

The HFPAT's Food Availability section has five subsections. We found mixed results when comparing subsection scores by geography including urban areas (n=6), towns (n=4), and rural areas (n=2). One subsection, *Food Distribution to Clients*, had nonsignificant differences with minimal effect sizes between geographic areas. Below, scores represent the percent of the maximum possible score.

### FRESH FRUITS & VEGETABLES

Food distributors in **RURAL** areas had a lower mean score (46%) compared to those in **TOWNS** (82%,  $p \leq 0.10$ ,  $d=1.57$ ) and **URBAN** (80%,  $d=1.39$ ) areas.



### LOW FAT DAIRY, EGGS, & GRAINS

Food distributors in **RURAL** areas had a lower mean score (29%) compared to those in **URBAN** (58%,  $d=0.97$ ) areas.



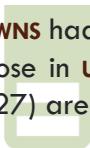
### FROZEN PRODUCE & LEAN PROTEINS

Food distributors in **URBAN** areas had a lower mean score (33%) compared to those in **TOWNS** (63%,  $p \leq 0.05$ ,  $d=2.33$ ) and **RURAL** (55%,  $d=1.11$ ) areas.



### CANNED FRUITS, VEGETABLES, & PROTEINS

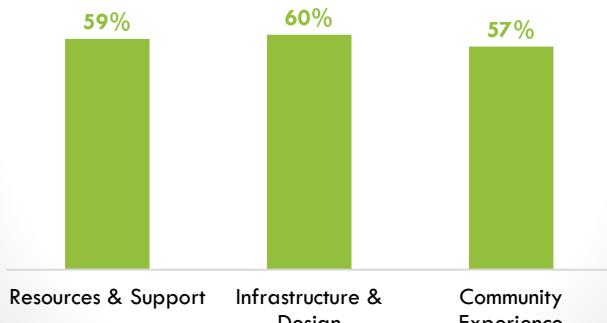
Food distributors in **TOWNS** had a lower mean score (31%) compared to those in **URBAN** (69%,  $d=1.19$ ) and **RURAL** (78%,  $d=1.27$ ) areas.



## FY25 DIG in Community Findings

We used the **DEVELOPING INTEGRATED GARDENS (DIG) IN COMMUNITY TOOL** to assess the integration of gardens into communities across three sections (below). In FY25, four LIAs across **six counties** used the DIG in Community tool for the first time with their garden partners at housing complexes, community centers, and teen centers.

**Nine gardens were assessed across three sections using the DIG in Community tool.** Section scores were calculated as percents out of the maximum score (out of 100%).



### **ON AVERAGE, THE MOST NEEDED SUPPORTS WERE RELATED TO:**

- Funding to maintain the garden over time
- Written garden program guides, policies, and agreements
- Adequate trash disposal, including a composting system
- Involving the broader community in garden activities and events

## UA Pima's PLAZA Mobile Market Transforms Food Access and Community Connection

This program cycle, the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Pima—known as the Garden Kitchen—rolled out the Promoting Local Arizona Agriculture (PLAZA) Mobile Market. The PLAZA Mobile Market brings local produce and staple goods to the Sunnyside community in Tucson once a week. We asked: (1) How has the PLAZA Mobile Market supported access to affordable, locally sourced foods; (2) How has the PLAZA Mobile Market affected social cohesion and networking among community members; (3) What

benefits have local farmers and community partners experienced through their involvement with the PLAZA Mobile Market; and (4) What broader community-wide or local food systems impacts have emerged due to the PLAZA Mobile Market? The five harvested outcomes demonstrate how the Garden Kitchen centered relationship building, community engagement, and equity to bring fresh, local produce to a community with scarce retail outlets.

**Outcome.** Beginning in FY22, The Garden Kitchen laid the foundation for the PLAZA Mobile Market, a weekly community market that increases access to affordable, locally grown produce and staple goods in the southside of Tucson.

### KEY PARTNERS

**INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE:** A refugee-serving organization whose farmers sell to the PLAZA Mobile Market.

**ISKASHITAA REFUGEE NETWORK:** A refugee-serving food harvesting program that sells produce to the PLAZA Mobile Market.

**TUCSON VILLAGE FARM:** A youth-serving food education farm that sells produce to the PLAZA Mobile Market.

**VALENCIA LIBRARY:** A library in the Sunnyside community that hosts the PLAZA Mobile market.

**2,150**  
sales since the launch of PLAZA Market

**5,700**  
pounds of local produce distributed

**38%**  
of sales were from SNAP, DUFB, and FMNP,  
totaling over \$4,967 in redemptions

**Description.** In FY23, The Garden Kitchen piloted two versions of a mobile local food hub at an affordable housing complex: a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model and a market model. The CSA pilot brought pre-packaged Tucson CSA produce bags to residents. Eight residents participated in the pilot each week, consistently picking up their shares and taking part in food demonstrations and lessons. The mobile market model was orchestrated in partnership with Tucson Village Farm, who sold their produce in the building lobby at discounted prices. Residents voiced that the market model best served their needs; therefore, The Garden Kitchen launched the PLAZA Mobile Market in FY24. Centered in the Sunnyside neighborhood where there is limited access to locally grown and culturally familiar produce, the market operates weekly at a trusted neighborhood site: the Valencia Library. Each market offers reduced-cost fresh produce from small local growers and staple items, such as bread and flour, from a local bakery. PLAZA Mobile Market has become a reliable food access point for the Sunnyside neighborhood, where transaction size has increased by 89% in the past year. The market also helps bridge an important gap, making it possible for individuals to access nutrition assistance benefits, such as Double Up Food Bucks (DUFB) and Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), they may not have known about or been able to use at other food outlets.

**Contribution.** From the start, The Garden Kitchen centered community engagement as the heart of the planning process. In FY22, The Garden Kitchen coordinated focus groups with 49 SNAP-eligible individuals to better understand the strengths and opportunities around food access in their community. They also connected with local food systems leaders, AZ Health Zone food system staff across Arizona, and mobile market leaders across the nation to understand the current strengths and gaps in the local food system and best practices for mobile markets. The team then coordinated the pilot, chose a

community-trusted site for the market informed by Census tract data, and built relationships with community partners and farmers. Lastly, The Garden Kitchen navigated complex challenges around accepting nutrition assistance benefits as a mobile market. This included applying for a SNAP retail license, coordinating between the state sponsor and University to offer DUFB and FMNP benefits, and problem-solving technical and administrative hurdles. These efforts were essential to making the PLAZA Mobile Market an accessible space for all.

**8** community residents voiced PLAZA Mobile Market's role in filling a gap in the community for access to fresh, affordable produce.

**"If the market was expensive, we wouldn't come. But we get to enjoy all the secondary benefits of the market, like the social aspect, because it is accessible to the community."**

**8** community residents discussed the convenient location of PLAZA Mobile Market, noting the ease of transportation and proximity to other community resources.

**"It's easy to come here. My P.O box and the library are here too. We don't need to go to the grocery store."**

**6** community residents expressed their preference of PLAZA Mobile Market over other local farmers markets, noting the long travel time, produce cost, and feelings of isolation at other markets.

**"PLAZA feels like an equalizer. [There is] more of a divide at farmers markets where you feel like a tourist, not a shopper."**

**5** community residents expressed their preference of PLAZA Mobile Market over the only grocery store in the community, noting the high quality and unique produce provided at the market.

**"The produce at the grocery store is low quality. Every tomato and onion I get is bad. You [also] see produce [at PLAZA] that you can't get at the store."**

**4** community residents shared that PLAZA Mobile Market's acceptance of nutrition assistance benefits provided needed support for supplementing food budgets.

**"PLAZA accepts senior coupons which helps a lot. I live on social security and a pension, and this market really helps supplement what I have for food."**

**Significance.** By bringing local food directly into the Sunnyside neighborhood and supporting benefit use, PLAZA Mobile Market is responsive to resident-voiced challenges of shopping at other farmers markets or their closest grocery store: transportation

and the availability, quality, and affordability of fresh produce. Through this environmental change, residents now have consistent access to locally grown and culturally familiar food in a trusted neighborhood space.

**Outcome.** PLAZA Mobile Market has become a trusted third space in the community for social cohesion, cultural connection, and food education.

**Description.** Since its launch in FY24, community residents who shop at the PLAZA Mobile Market have fostered meaningful connections with each other and The Garden Kitchen staff. The market sparks conversations about childhood meal traditions and cooking methods, creating space for residents to share personal experiences around heritage crops and cultural recipes. During our conversations with community members:

- Seven residents described the PLAZA Mobile Market as an inclusive gathering space to foster social connection and share cultural recipes.
- Six residents noted the food education offered by PLAZA Mobile Market staff, emphasizing how it set the market apart from other food outlets by helping them understand how to use the produce.

Staff from the Valencia Library noted that, together, the library and the PLAZA Mobile Market enhances the neighborhood's sense of safety. The market also increases foot traffic into the library where residents can connect to other community resources and services.

**Contribution.** The Garden Kitchen designed PLAZA Mobile Market to be an inclusive and culturally responsive space, where food serves as a catalyst for conversation and relationship building. The market also responds to a community-identified motivational

factor for shopping at a mobile market: the desire for safety and connectedness. In addition, when community members express interest in getting more involved, The Garden Kitchen provides opportunities for them to do so, including volunteer roles. In some cases, this engagement has led to professional development support and job referrals. Overall, the market's consistent presence has helped transform a grocery shopping visit into a meaningful experience that strengthens the social fabric of the community.

---

**"This is a place to have meaningful conversations. People are talking about family history, farming, how to plant, and how to cook. People share about how food is prepared and cooked in their cultures."**

**-Community Resident**

---

**Significance.** PLAZA Mobile Market is seen as a "third space" in the community, a place beyond home or work where residents can connect with The Garden Kitchen staff and other neighbors. By intertwining connection and food access, the market contributes to a whole-person approach towards community wellness, supporting not just nutritional needs, but also mental, cultural, and social well-being.

**TO EXPRESS HER GRATITUDE FOR THE PLAZA MOBILE MARKET AS A SPACE FOR COMMUNITY CONNECTION, A RESIDENT WROTE THE FOLLOWING POEM:**

#### **The Last Champions**

When the world around is mad, kindness a rare jewel -  
a gentleness to soothe the frenzy of survival

Look to those with a light in their eyes  
softness in their touch and love in their voice.

They remind us who we are, all that we can be  
when we are no one.

When there is you and there is me  
these fade, fade into meaninglessness  
brought back into the nature of our being.

**We are love. We are one. We are each other.**

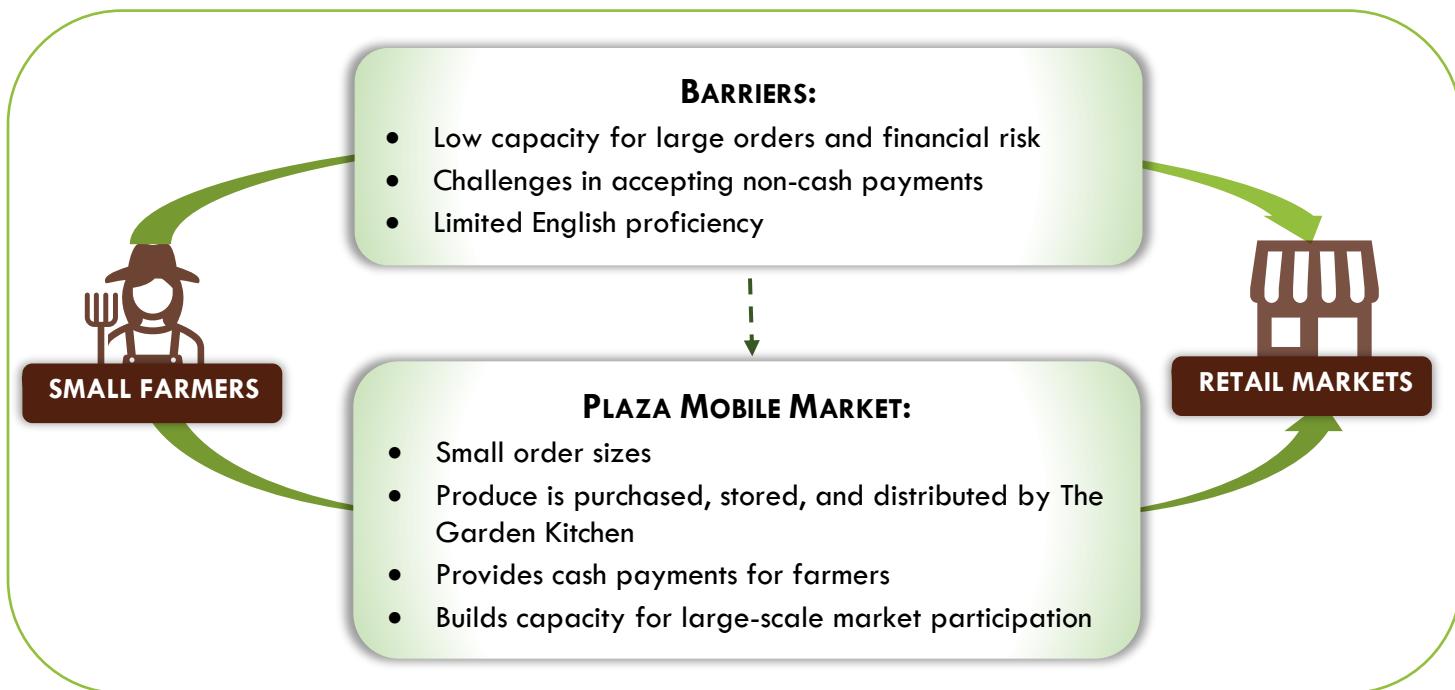
**Outcome.** PLAZA Mobile Market provides a selling outlet for marginalized, small farmers that supports their economic growth and farming experience for participation in the local food system.

**Description.** Through the PLAZA Mobile Market, small farmers from local refugee resettlement programs have a low barrier market to sell their produce. Staff from the International Rescue Committee noted how this farm-to-market model creates a tangible pathway in the local food system for farmers to gain experience to sell to larger markets while receiving fair market prices for their produce. Through the PLAZA Mobile Market partnership, farmers build step-by-step skills that are crucial for broader participation in the local food system. Importantly, farmers develop their own minimum sales requirements, an essential step for equitable practices when selling to other purchasers.

**Contribution.** In FY22, The Garden Kitchen coordinated interviews with ten small farmers throughout the county to better understand how a mobile produce market could support them and better understand their needs as growers. Staff also

connected with food systems leaders across Tucson and found that small farmers face multiple challenges to enter the larger, more complex local retail environment (see below).

The Garden Kitchen developed trusting partnerships with two refugee resettlement programs to source from marginalized farmers, using the PLAZA Mobile Market as a stepping stone for them to gain experience before transitioning into larger markets. They also offer technical assistance on crop planning, order fulfillment, and produce processing to help farmers build experience for large-scale selling. Importantly, by purchasing produce at farmer-negotiated prices, The Garden Kitchen fosters an equitable supply chain where farmers are ensured fair wages for their produce. As a result of these efforts, **purchasing from small farmers has increased by 140%** (in dollars), demonstrating a significant boost in economic opportunity for growers.



**Significance.** PLAZA Mobile Market centers farmers who have historically faced systemic barriers to food retail participation, such as limited language proficiency, capacity, and access to capital. The Garden Kitchen's model provides a more manage-

able scale for beginner farmers. Importantly, farmers can rely on the PLAZA Mobile Market for consistent weekly sales, which supports their income and helps them understand best practices related to market participation.

**Outcome.** Due to the PLAZA Mobile Market, community partners increased their community reach, expanded their acceptance of nutrition assistance benefits, gained additional funding to support their volunteers and programs, and strengthened their role in the food system.

**Description.** The Garden Kitchen strengthened its partnerships with four community organizations: the Tucson Village Farm, Iskashitaa Refugee Network, International Rescue Committee, and Valencia Library to support the PLAZA Mobile Market. These

partnerships were intentionally fostered based on shared missions to expand their reach of fresh produce to underserved communities. All community partners described several benefits of their collaboration with the PLAZA Mobile Market:



The partnership enables each organization to serve communities they could not reach alone due to limited resources and capacity.



The collaboration boosts each partner's presence in the community and local food system.



The market offers a low barrier selling outlet with manageable orders and produce pickup. This allows partners to gain a small amount of funding for their volunteers or programs.



Partners receive training and support to accept Senior and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) FMNP and DUFB benefits and can expand their services for the community.

*"It's been a little bit of income for us. It's kept the produce sales and program going at a time when I would have scaled it back to nothing, because I just could not deal with selling at the point we were at."*

**Contribution.** The Garden Kitchen cultivated and sustained partnerships with the Tucson Village Farm, Iskashitaa Refugee Network, International Rescue Committee, and Valencia Library, while continuously checking in with each partner to ensure their needs are met. Through PLAZA Mobile Market, The Garden Kitchen created a food access strategy that aligned with partner missions, offered logistical support, and provided a consistent, low barrier selling outlet.

In addition, The Garden Kitchen staff supported Tucson Village Farm's enrollment as a DUFB site by serving as a liaison with the program's state sponsor, assisting with paperwork, coordinating a site visit to finalize the process, and continuing to offer technical assistance as needed. They have also trained Valencia Library staff on enrolling individuals in nutrition assistance programs, strengthening both staff capacity and access to food assistance in the community.

**Significance.** By fostering partnerships with mission-aligned organizations, The Garden Kitchen not only expanded their reach of fresh produce, but also built partner capacity for nutrition assistance programs. The low barrier design of the market provided a reliable outlet for organizations to manageably sell produce, gain funding, and enhance their visibility throughout the community. Collectively, this reinforces a more connected and resilient local food system.

***"We really wanted to partner with [The Garden Kitchen] because they can reach a population of people that we can't reach. It's nice for us to be able to sell there and get our vegetables to other places other than our community right around us. We love how easy [The Garden Kitchen] makes it for us."***

***-Tucson Village Farm***

**Outcome.** PLAZA Mobile Market filled a gap in the local food system by creating a low barrier, small-scale market for producers. Through this work, The Garden Kitchen has become a trusted local food systems advocate that advances knowledge-sharing across Cooperative Extension and national networks.

**Description.** PLAZA Mobile Market has become a reliable market for small farmers and community partners to sell their produce. In the process of addressing this need, The Garden Kitchen has built strong partnerships throughout the local food system, strengthened university-wide relationships, advanced Cooperative Extension's expertise around mobile markets, and have provided technical assistance to organizations working to start mobile markets across the country.

At the **LOCAL LEVEL**, The Garden Kitchen identified and addressed a major gap in the local food system by creating a low barrier market for both small farmers and community organizations. As a result, they therefore established relationships with partners across the Pima food system, becoming a reputable advocate and a trusted knowledge source for the local food policy council.

**Significance.** PLAZA Mobile Market has addressed a critical gap in the local food system in creating a small-scale market for producers and facilitating food access in a community with limited access to fresh food. As such, the Garden Kitchen has emerged as a trusted partner in the food system and has strengthened Cooperative Extension's capacity to support mobile markets and advance community-driven approaches to food access nationally.

**Contribution.** In the planning stages of the PLAZA Mobile Market, The Garden Kitchen focused on formative research to help expand their understanding of mobile markets and food access needs across Pima County. Through the pilot and eventual operation of the PLAZA Mobile Market, The Garden Kitchen became an expert for food systems advocacy and mobile market knowledge-sharing at the local level, the institutional level, and at the national level. For example:

At the **INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL**, The Garden Kitchen fostered relationships throughout the University of Arizona and deepened their knowledge of mobile markets. This laid the groundwork for the creation of a Cooperative Extension Mobile Market Manual.

At the **NATIONAL LEVEL**, The Garden Kitchen provided leadership through technical assistance and knowledge-sharing among Cooperative Extension and other food systems professionals who were looking to build out mobile markets in their communities.

**“[PLAZA] has fewer barriers to entry for [farmers]. It's been a good opportunity for folks to step into selling without starting with an order of 100 bunches, which is hard for them to handle at first. Starting with PLAZA is more manageable. It's been a great way of easing people into the process of doing estimation and making sales, from selling nothing to selling something.”**

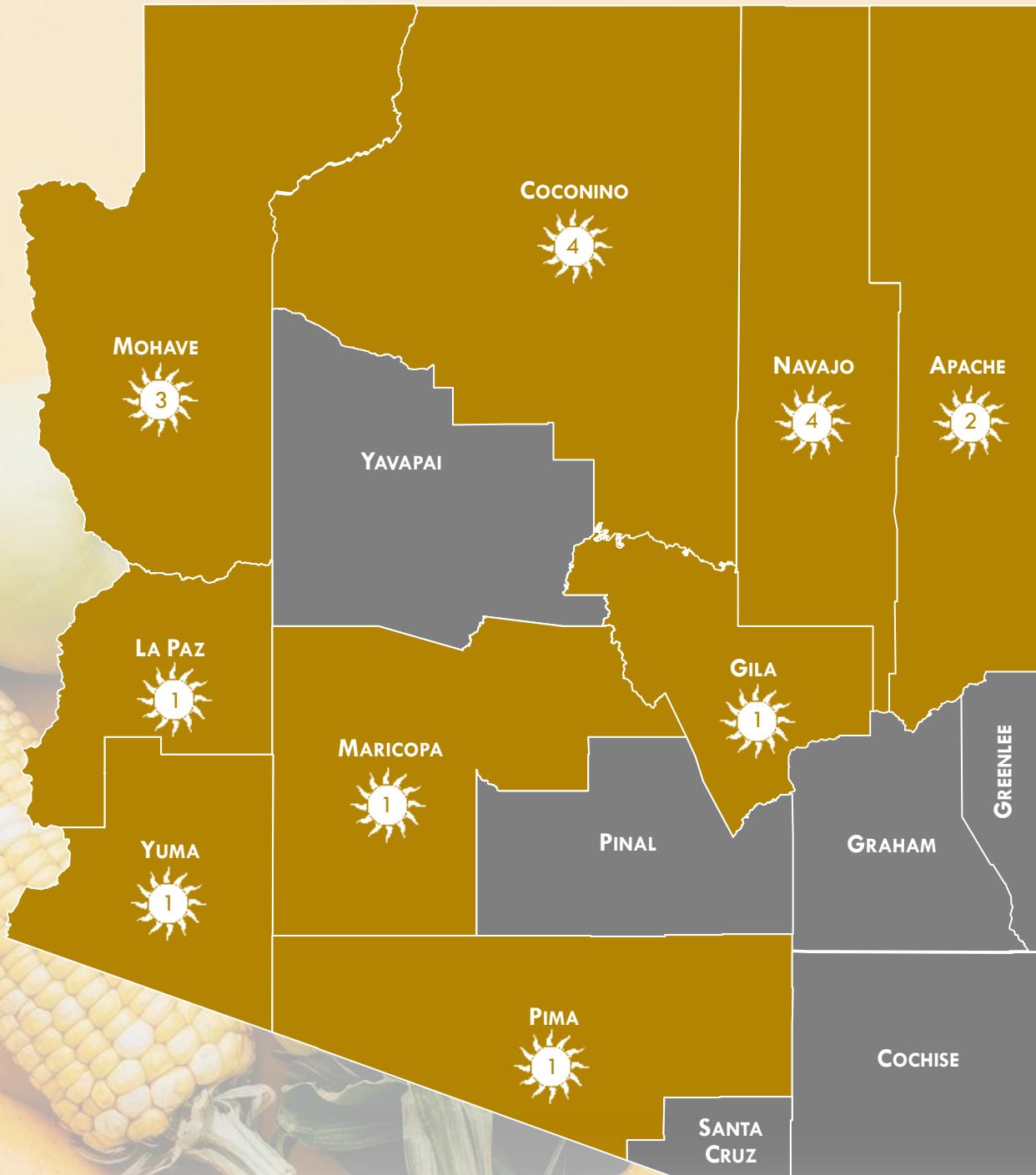
*-International Rescue Committee*

**“Food is a connector for community nourishment, support, and empowerment. The PLAZA [Mobile] Market bridges community survival to community flourishing.”**

*-Community Resident*

# Tribal-Serving Programming

Support the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies, systems, and environments that promote nutrition and physical activity in tribal communities



## KEY



= # tribal communities that LIAs engaged with, 10/1/20 – 05/23/25



= did NOT support tribal communities during the FY21-25 program cycle

# Activity Patterns in Tribal Communities

From FY21-25 (10/1/20 – 4/30/25), Local Implementing Agencies (LIAs) who worked with tribal communities reported their unduplicated partnerships and policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) actions in SEEDS.

LIAs that engaged in Tribal communities

**REPORTED ESTABLISHING**

**71**

partnerships with Indian Tribal Organizations

In Food Systems, Community Gardens had the

**MOST REPORTED ACTIONS**

**379**

in Tribal communities

In School Systems, Policy Revision & Communication

**REPORTED**

**104**

actions in Tribal-serving schools

In Active Living, Improve Usability and Access to Community Resources had the

**FEWEST REPORTED ACTIONS**

**63**

in Tribal communities

## FY21-25 Tribal Community Assessments

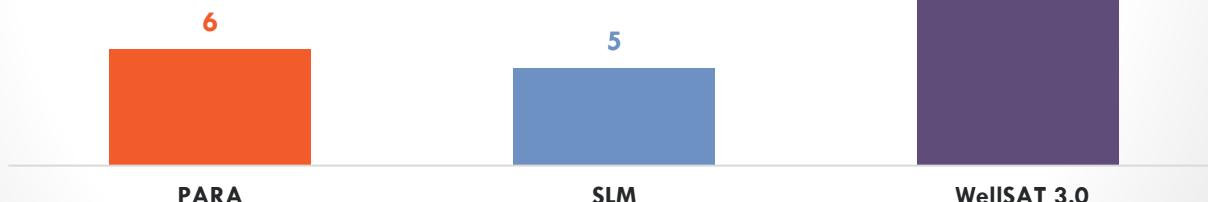
Between FY21-FY25, tribal communities used three primary tools to assess their school and community environments: the **WELLNESS SCHOOL ASSESSMENT TOOL (WELLSAT 3.0)** to assess the quality of school districts' local wellness policies (LWPs); the **SMARTER LUNCHROOMS MOVEMENT (SLM) SCORECARD** to assess the lunchroom environment; and the **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY RESOURCE ASSESSMENT (PARA)** to examine Features (equipment), Amenities (nice-to-have comforts), and Incivilities (things to reduce or eliminate) at parks and trails. Together, these tools provided insights into Tribal-serving schools' and communities' PSE supports.

Across the three tools, a total of 35 sites conducted assessments. The WellSAT 3.0 was the most commonly used tool (n=24 sites), followed by PARA (n=6 sites), and SLM (n=5 sites).

"The WellSAT 3.0 proved to be an effective tool in Tuba City. At the district level, administrators appreciated the tool and expressed support for updating their policies after a presentation to all seven school principals. At the school level, one site successfully updated its Local Wellness Policy based on the WellSAT findings, while others engaged in ongoing conversations about improvements."

—Coconino County Health and Human Services

**24**



## **Strengthening School Wellness and Food Sovereignty Across Two Communities in Coconino County**

## Building Sustainable Wellness Systems Across Tribal-Serving Schools in the Leupp Community

This program cycle, Coconino County Health and Human Services—known as AZ Health Zone (AZHZ) CCHHS—partnered with three Leupp-area tribal-serving schools to support school wellness efforts by strengthening policy, programming, and cross-school collaboration. Central to this effort were Local Wellness Policies (LWPs), which provide schools with a written framework for promoting healthy eating, physical activity, and overall wellness. We asked:

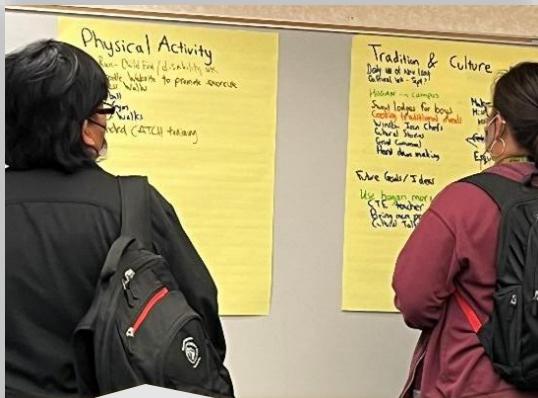
How did wellness policies and practices evolve at Leupp schools? What role did AZHZ CCHHS play in supporting nutrition, physical activity, and wellness events? These guiding questions led to key outcomes related to: (1) the implementation of comprehensive LWPs informed by WellSAT assessments and (2) the creation of an inter-school collaboration network that bridged Tribal, federal, state, and charter systems.

**Outcome.** From FY21–FY25, the three Leupp-area tribal-serving schools strengthened their LWPs using WellSAT 3.0 guidance and, through partnership with WIHCC, built a collaborative support system that honored each school’s identity while advancing wellness, education, and community engagement.

## KEY PARTNERS

- Leupp Elementary School (Flagstaff Unified School District [FUSD])
- STAR School (Public Charter)
- Leupp Schools, Inc (Bureau of Indian Education [BIE])
- Winslow Indian Healthcare Center (WIHCC)

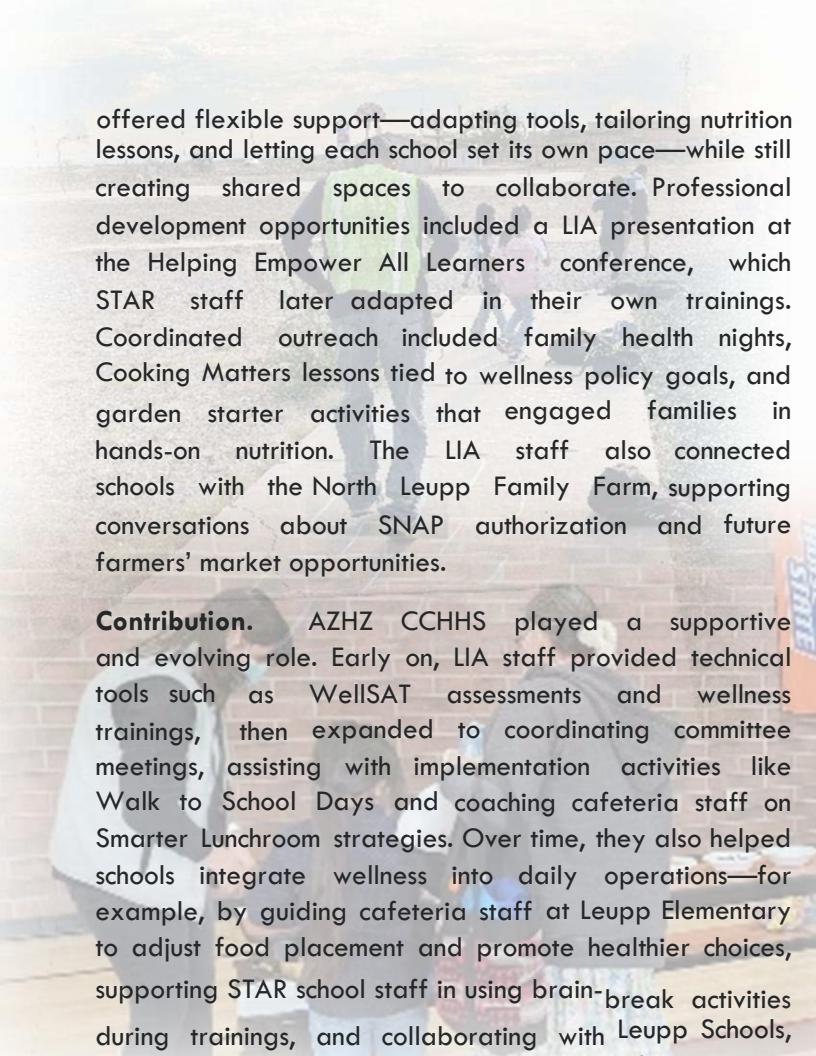
**Description.** With support from AZHZ CCHHS, each school drew on its own strengths to approach the wellness policy process in ways that honored its unique identity while advancing shared goals. At the STAR School, the Wellness Committee and Local Implementing Agency (LIA) staff used the WellSAT 3.0 assessment and the Arizona Department of Education triennial review to guide meaningful policy updates. At Leupp Elementary School, the cafeteria manager, School Health Team, and LIA staff integrated wellness practices, such as Walk to School Days and Smarter Lunchroom strategies into the FUSD wellness policy, reinforcing a commitment to healthy systems and environments. At Leupp Schools, Inc., the principal, adult education director, and teachers rediscovered a five-year-old draft policy, revised it with support from LIA staff using a BIE template, and formally adopted it through a school board vote.



School wellness committee members worked together to identify implementation priorities.

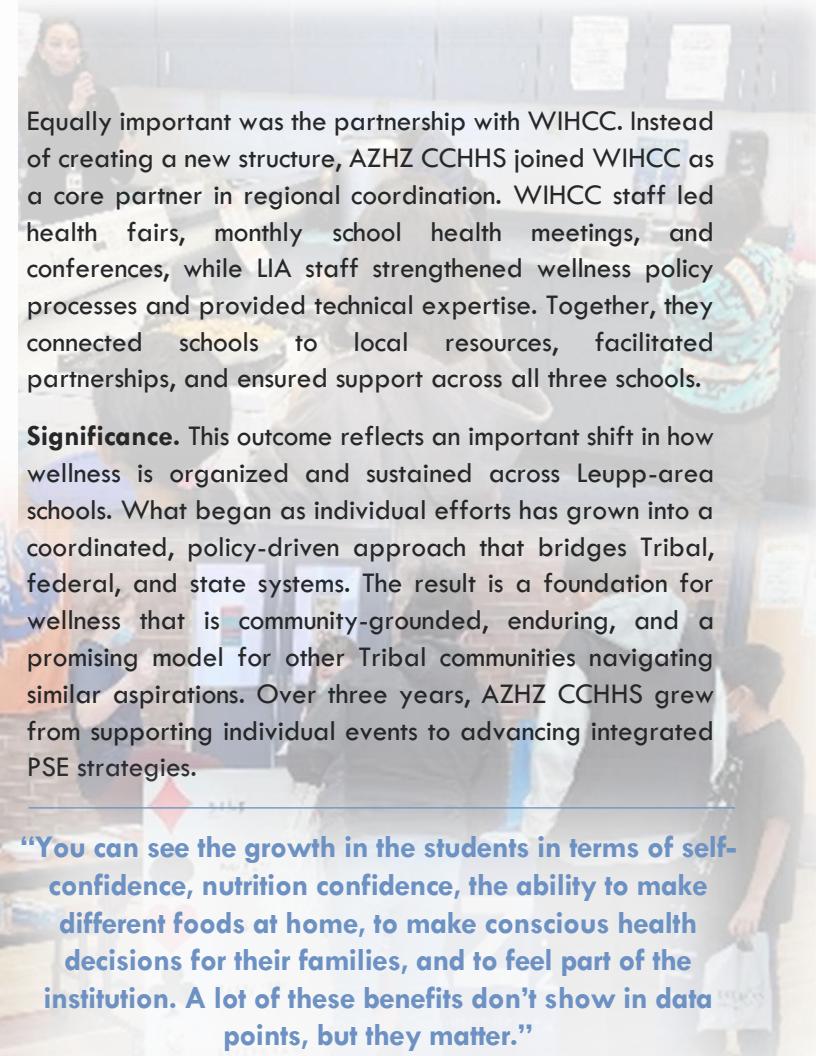
Through this process, LIA staff and school wellness leaders recognized that schools were already practicing many aspects of wellness day-to-day, even if these efforts were not fully documented in policy or aligned with updated USDA Food Service requirements. Strengthening their LWPs with WellSAT guidance helped all three schools establish wellness committees that brought together staff, families, and community members for shared decision-making, goal setting, and alignment with wellness plans.

Community engagement was further strengthened through targeted surveys and event-based sign-ups that both raised awareness of updated wellness policies and recruited new committee members. For example, LIA staff gathered 16 new sign-ups for STAR School's LWP committee during a Family Health Night, and Leupp Elementary families signed up at open house events to support Walk to School Day and participate in the committee's work. With respect to each school's independence, LIA staff



offered flexible support—adapting tools, tailoring nutrition lessons, and letting each school set its own pace—while still creating shared spaces to collaborate. Professional development opportunities included a LIA presentation at the Helping Empower All Learners conference, which STAR staff later adapted in their own trainings. Coordinated outreach included family health nights, Cooking Matters lessons tied to wellness policy goals, and garden starter activities that engaged families in hands-on nutrition. The LIA staff also connected schools with the North Leupp Family Farm, supporting conversations about SNAP authorization and future farmers' market opportunities.

**Contribution.** AZHZ CCHHS played a supportive and evolving role. Early on, LIA staff provided technical tools such as WellSAT assessments and wellness trainings, then expanded to coordinating committee meetings, assisting with implementation activities like Walk to School Days and coaching cafeteria staff on Smarter Lunchroom strategies. Over time, they also helped schools integrate wellness into daily operations—for example, by guiding cafeteria staff at Leupp Elementary to adjust food placement and promote healthier choices, supporting STAR school staff in using brain-break activities during trainings, and collaborating with Leupp Schools, Inc. to bring Cooking Matters lessons into K-12 classrooms. These kinds of small but consistent changes were seen across all three schools, showing how policy updates translated into everyday practice.



Equally important was the partnership with WICHCC. Instead of creating a new structure, AZHZ CCHHS joined WICHCC as a core partner in regional coordination. WICHCC staff led health fairs, monthly school health meetings, and conferences, while LIA staff strengthened wellness policy processes and provided technical expertise. Together, they connected schools to local resources, facilitated partnerships, and ensured support across all three schools.

**Significance.** This outcome reflects an important shift in how wellness is organized and sustained across Leupp-area schools. What began as individual efforts has grown into a coordinated, policy-driven approach that bridges Tribal, federal, and state systems. The result is a foundation for wellness that is community-grounded, enduring, and a promising model for other Tribal communities navigating similar aspirations. Over three years, AZHZ CCHHS grew from supporting individual events to advancing integrated PSE strategies.

**"You can see the growth in the students in terms of self-confidence, nutrition confidence, the ability to make different foods at home, to make conscious health decisions for their families, and to feel part of the institution. A lot of these benefits don't show in data points, but they matter."**

*-Interview with Leupp Schools Inc. staff*

## Integrating Food Access, Culture, and Community Leadership in Tuba City

### KEY PARTNERS

- St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance
- St. Jude's Food Bank
- Upper Village Moencopi Governor
- Bashas Diné Market
- Navajo Nation Department of Behavioral and Mental Health Services (NN DBMHS)

In the Tuba City community, AZHZ CCHHS and local partners recognized multiple gaps and opportunities across the local food system—from the lack of summer meals in July to the need for more accessible retail options, nutrition education, and culturally grounded gardening programs. Addressing these challenges required both short-term solutions and long-term system changes, guided by community values and the Navajo principle of T'áá hwó' ájí t'éego (self-determination).

We asked: How did partnerships in Tuba City expand food access and strengthen the local food system? And what role did AZHZ CCHHS play in supporting sustainable, community-driven approaches? The two harvested outcomes summarize how CCHHS's community-responsive efforts improved food access in the short term through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and advanced long-term resilience through integrated food system strategies.

**Outcome.** From FY23–FY25, AZHZ CCHHS and local partners established two SFSP sites in Tuba City. These sites served more than 2,900 meals during the previously underserved July period each year, strengthening food access and building local capacity for long-term sustainability.

**Description.** Beginning in January 2023, AZHZ CCHHS LIA staff joined the Summer Nutrition Advisory Committee and partnered with St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance to address July food access gaps. This work led to two new SFSP sites. St. Jude's Food Bank launched operations in July 2023, serving 713 meals over 18 days. The Moencopi Community Center opened the following year, serving more than 1,360 meals in 2024 and 680 meals in 2025 through a new five-day pickup system.

Moencopi's early challenges with staffing and background clearances were resolved through close collaboration between LIA staff and Upper Village Moencopi Governor Dale Lucero, who worked together on regulatory navigation, equipment setup, and volunteer recruitment. By FY25, site operations transitioned from being mostly directed by LIA staff to being led by local community staff and volunteers. St. Jude's operated independently, and Moencopi secured AZHZ funding and staffing support to sustain the site long term.

**Contribution.** In Tuba City, AZHZ CCHHS played a convening and capacity-building role, bringing together St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance, St. Jude's Food Bank, faith-based groups, and tribal leadership to address the July food access gap. As sites became more operational, LIA staff provided hands-on support—including direct meal service when needed, technical assistance with reporting requirements, and distribution of culturally relevant nutrition education materials such as recipe cards, MyPlate activity books, and garden starter kits.

Over time, CCHHS guided the transition from LIA staff-led to community-driven operations by connecting sites with sustainable funding, supporting local capacity-building efforts, and gradually stepping back as local expertise grew. A key milestone was securing AZHZ funding for required Navajo Nation and school background clearances for non-school staff and volunteers, which had caused months-long delays and limited programming. Covering these costs removed a major barrier and allowed sites to operate as independent, community-led initiatives.

**Significance.** This outcome shows how community-led SFSP sites can create sustainable food access when grounded in trust, cultural awareness, and shared leadership. Families in Moencopi expressed gratitude for having meal sites close to home, convenient pickup systems, and nutrition resources such as recipe cards, activity booklets, and garden starter kits. Collaboration among food banks, tribal leadership, and faith-based partners not only improved food security but also deepened community ties and established local infrastructure that leaders can continue to strengthen and sustain over time.

**“The Moencopi Governor recognized the program’s impact, noting that it met a critical need in the community and expressing his enthusiasm for continuing the program in future summers.”**

*-AZHZ Coconino County Health and Human Services*

**Outcome.** From FY21–FY25, AZHZ CCHHS advanced Tuba City's local food system by integrating nutrition education, retail improvements, and culturally responsive gardening. These efforts created multiple pathways for improved food access while honoring traditional Navajo practices and supporting community self-determination.

**Description.** AZHZ CCHHS LIA staff and local partners took a holistic approach to strengthening Tuba City's local food system—weaving together food access, cultural identity, nutrition education, and retail improvements. Beginning in 2021, they worked with St. Jude's Food Bank to transform food distribution into engaging educational opportunities. Monthly nutrition activity bags—containing items like seeds, soil, Native MyPlate placemats, recipe cards, and family activity sheets—were distributed through the “Healthy Beginning” program for children ages 0–5 and the Senior Food Program for elders, with more than 170 activity bags provided to families across the community.

Building on these efforts, retail environments also became focus for change. At Bashas' Diné Market, updated STORE assessments guided meaningful improvements such as reintroducing affordable fruit baskets, adding recipe card displays, and addressing community concerns about “ceremonial baskets” containing too many high-fat, high-sugar, and high-sodium foods. In-store demonstrations created opportunities for community input, with families requesting healthier options like whole wheat tortillas, quinoa, and Greek yogurt. Store managers committed to expanding their healthier product offerings moving forward.

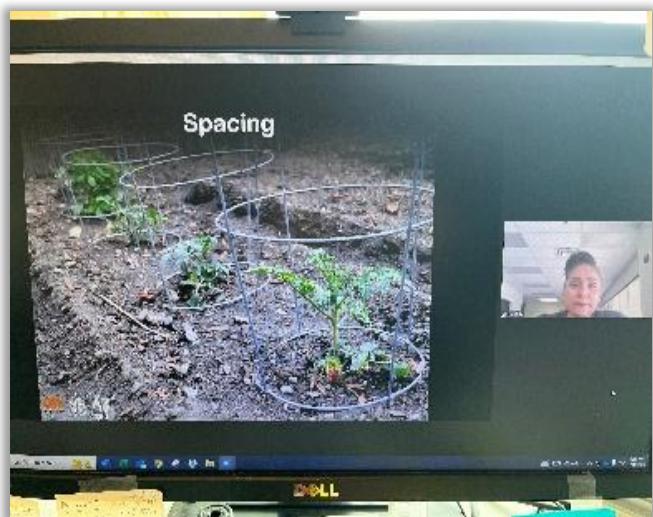
Gardening programs added another layer of transformation by rooting nutrition education in Navajo traditions. LIA staff adapted the Seed to Supper program to reflect Navajo traditions and values, integrating traditional stories, ancestral knowledge, and the principle of T'áá hwó' ájí t'éego (self-determination) into hands-on educational opportunities. Sessions were offered at the Tuba City Library, community center, and local Chapter House, where community members came together to learn practical gardening skills as well as nutrition education.

The Navajo Nation Department of Behavioral & Mental Health Services (NN DBMHS) was also a key partner—first providing space for hybrid sessions as the community emerged from COVID restrictions and later contributing traditional knowledge around planting practices. Their guidance included the use of traditional tools like planting sticks and teachings about cultural taboos, ensuring that ancestral practices remained central to the program. For the community, this was essential to making gardening education not only practical, but also culturally meaningful and sustainable.

**Contribution.** Throughout this effort, AZHZ CCHHS acted as cultural bridges and adaptive partners, helping align food system work with community priorities and traditional knowledge. Their role extended beyond direct program delivery—they built community trust, connected partners across different systems, and created space for community voices to guide decision-making. Their technical assistance and cultural awareness helped turn community feedback into meaningful programmatic change. Most importantly, by helping to strengthen local leadership and centering ancestral knowledge, they laid the foundation for a food system the community can sustain and continue to build upon into the future.

**“I have used the Seed to Supper lessons to harvest my garden and even have the confidence to do a big cornfield. Thanks to Seed to Supper lessons and its virtual opportunity, I was able to attain more skills.”**

-Seed to Supper participant



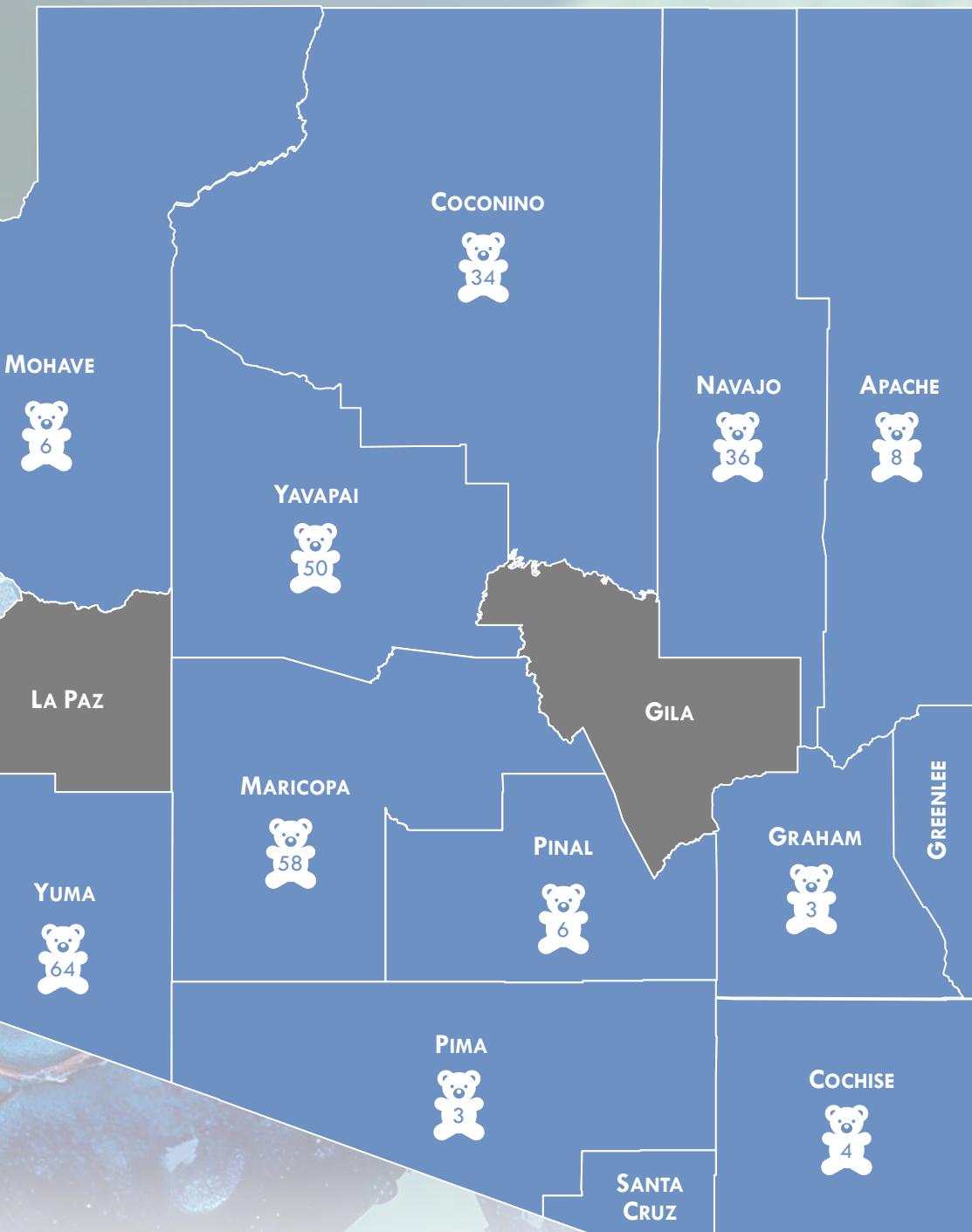
**Top:** LIA staff provided a Seed to Supper virtual lesson via Zoom.

**Bottom:** LIA staff surveyed families at the Tuba City Public Library to help shape upcoming Seed to Supper lessons, while also reconnecting with the NNBHS coordinator to plan future activities.

**Significance.** Integrating T'áá hwó' ájí t'éego (self-determination) throughout programming showed how tailored nutrition initiatives can strengthen both tribal sovereignty and cultural preservation. What makes this especially meaningful is the sense of ownership and continuity it fostered. Community members have shown genuine excitement, interest, and commitment to sustaining these efforts and staying engaged even when challenges arose. This ongoing involvement demonstrates how community leadership is transforming food access in Tuba City into a foundation of resilience and food sovereignty.

# Early Care & Education (ECE) Systems

Support the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies that promote nutrition and physical activity in ECE-based Systems



## KEY



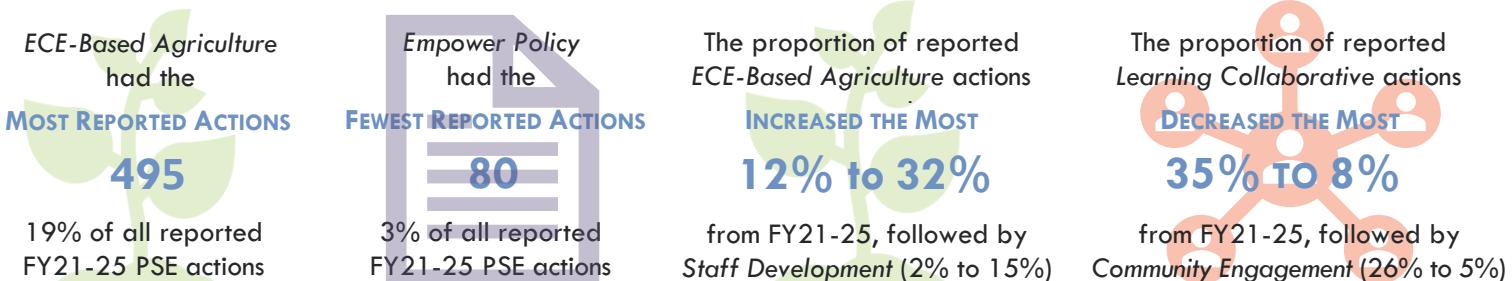
= # matched Go NAPSACC assessments, 10/1/20 – 3/1/25



= did NOT work in ECE Systems during the FY21 – FY25 program cycle

## ECE Systems Activity Patterns

From FY21-25 (10/1/20 – 4/30/25), Local Implementing Agencies (LIAs) reported their unduplicated policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) actions in SEEDS. Of the AZ Health Zone's eight ECE Systems Activities:

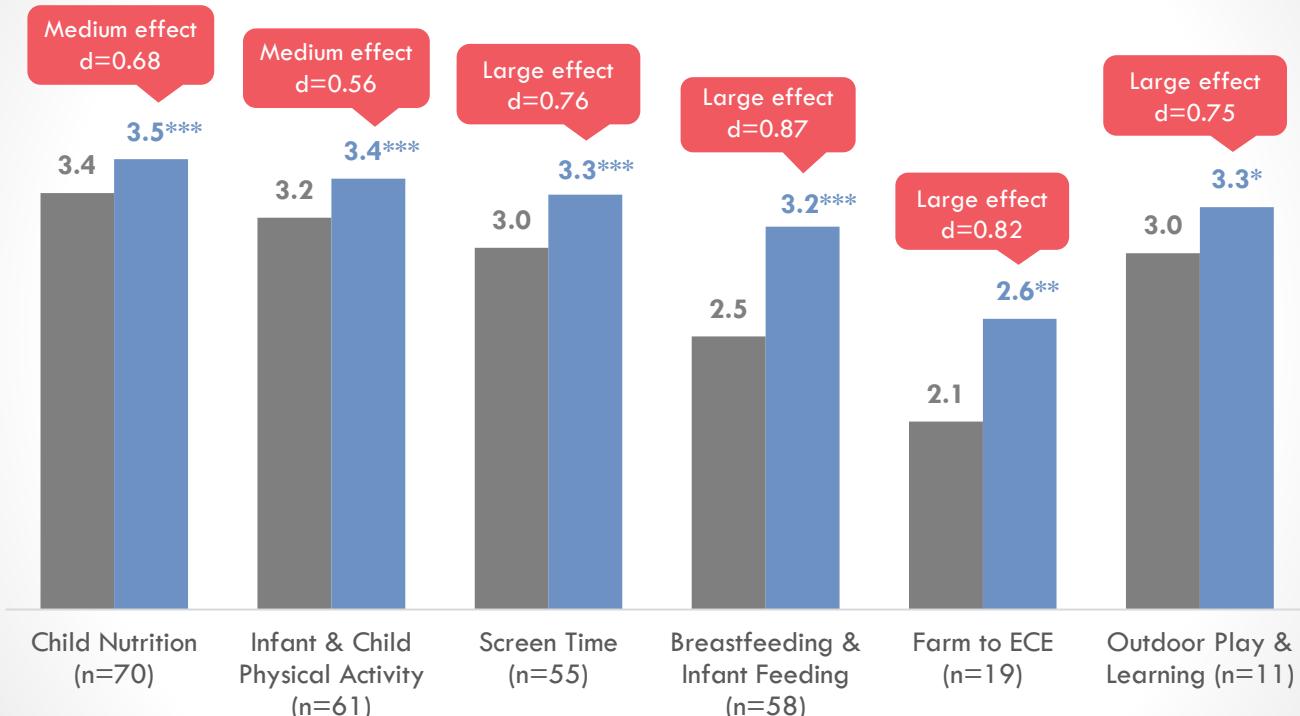


## FY21-25 Go NAPSACC Findings

We used the online Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care, referred to as **Go NAPSACC**, to assess ECE providers' PSEs. The confidence level for this evaluation was set at 90% ( $p \leq 0.10$ ) due to the modest sample sizes ( $n=11-70$ , depending on topic).

**Mean total GoNAPSACC scores increased from PRE to POST across all six topics assessed.**

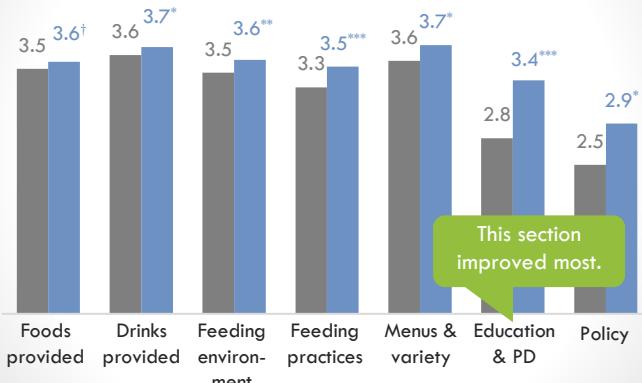
Scores were rounded to the nearest tenth and ranged from 1 (weakest) to 4 (best) practice.



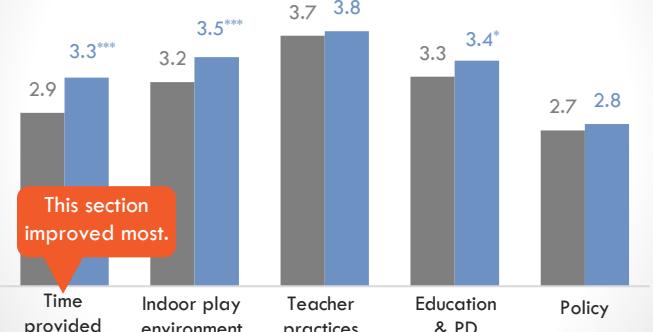
\* $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$

# Results by Go NAPSACC Topic

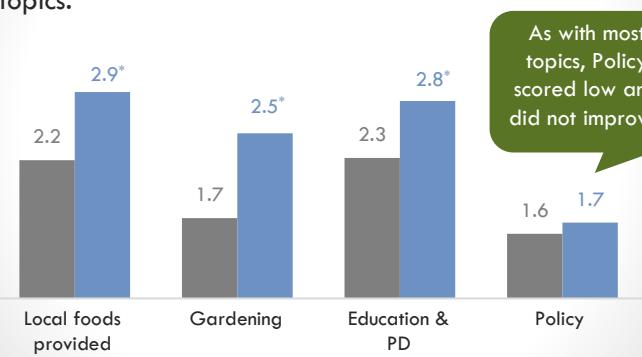
All mean **CHILD NUTRITION** section scores increased from **PRE** to **POST**, with small to large effect sizes (n=70).



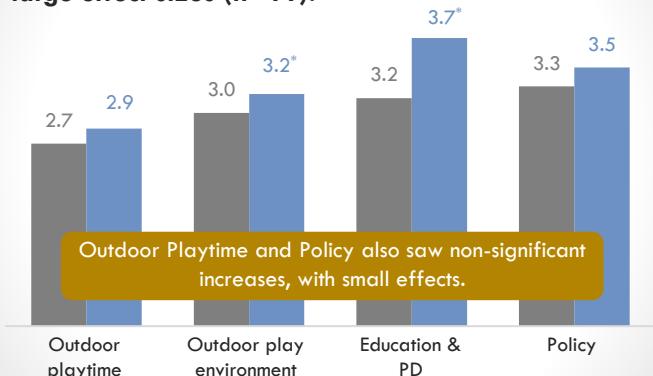
Three of five mean **INFANT & CHILD PHYSICAL ACTIVITY** section scores increased from **PRE** to **POST**, with medium effect sizes (n=61).



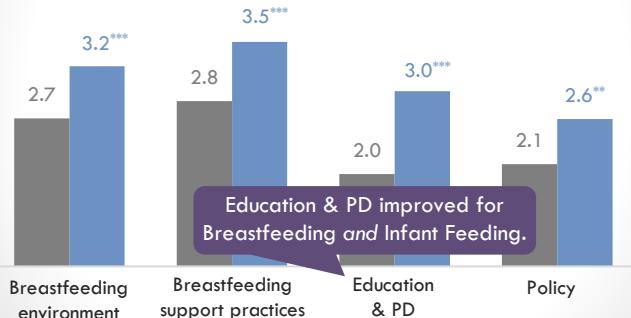
Three of the four mean **FARM TO ECE** section scores increased from **PRE** to **POST**, with large effect sizes (n=19). Overall, scores were lower than for other topics.



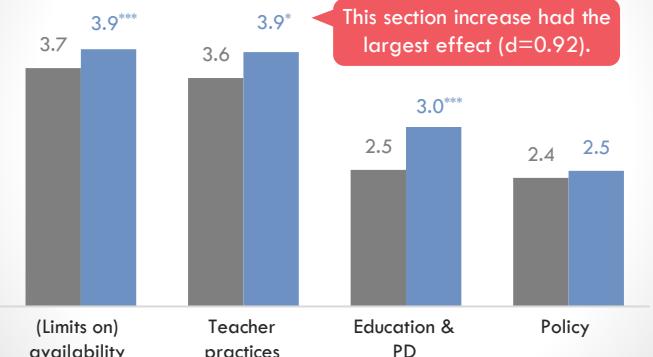
Two of the four mean **OUTDOOR PLAY & LEARNING** section scores increased from **PRE** to **POST**, with large effect sizes (n=11).



All four mean **BREASTFEEDING** section scores increased from **PRE** to **POST**, with medium to large effect sizes (n=58). One of the four Infant Feeding section scores (not shown) also improved, with a large effect (n=19).



Three of the four mean **SCREEN TIME** section scores increased from **PRE** to **POST**, with medium to large effect sizes (n=55).



<sup>†</sup>p≤0.10, \*p≤0.05, \*\*p≤0.01, \*\*\*p≤0.001

## Nurturing ECE Providers' Policies & Practices in Yuma

This program cycle, the Yuma County Public Health Services District—known as the AZ Health Zone Yuma—leveraged their Go NAPSACC expertise to support ECE centers and family child care homes (FCCHs) in PSE changemaking. We asked: What effect did Go NAPSACC participation have on Yuma ECE providers' policies and practices? How did

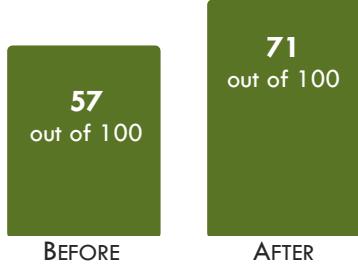
the AZ Health Zone Yuma respond to local needs and challenges to influence outcomes? Here, we report progress with: (1) PSE changes across ECEs in the San Luis community and (2) the establishment of a countywide Farm to ECE learning collaborative in response to the expressed interest of surveyed FCCHs.

**Outcome.** The combination of [Go NAPSACC](#) participation with the AZ Health Zone Yuma's consistent communication and tailored technical assistance positively impacted five ECE providers' nutrition- and physical activity-related PSEs in the tight-knit border community of San Luis [LT5].

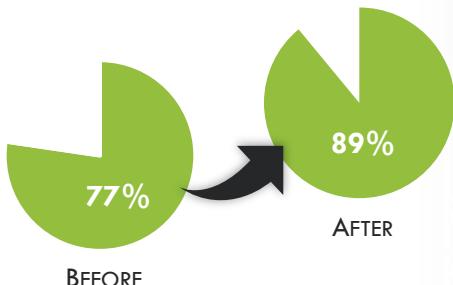
### KEY PARTNERS

- Four Chicanos por la Causa sites: Bienestar First Step, Las Casitas, San Luis D Center, San Luis G Center
- Estrellita Child Care Center, LLC
- Yuma Unified High School District's Lil' Winders Preschool

**ECE centers' mean total FARM TO ECE scores increased after engaging in Go NAPSACC (n=6).**



**Providers' mean % of best practices met in CHILD NUTRITION increased after Go NAPSACC support (n=3).**



**Description.** This program cycle, the AZ Health Zone Yuma recruited ECE providers in [San Luis](#) to engage in Go NAPSACC's [5-step improvement process](#), available in Spanish and English. After Go NAPSACC enrollment, the providers selected from among six nutrition and physical activity topics to pursue PSE improvements. During this process, all participating centers received robust technical assistance from the AZ Health Zone Yuma.

As a result, five ECE centers working in **FARM TO ECE** and/or **CHILD NUTRITION** saw noteworthy improvements in their total Go NAPSACC scores, their percent of items meeting best practices, and observable PSEs (see figures, bottom left). In addition, one provider saw an increase in their **INFANT & CHILD PHYSICAL ACTIVITY** scores, accompanied by observed changes in their practices and environment, during a period of close collaboration with the AZ Health Zone Yuma.

Across centers, progress was slowed by ECE staff turnover and competing priorities and facilitated by LIA support and engagement with Go NAPSACC's resources, trainings, and materials. For providers under a parent organization, progress was also sometimes inhibited by changing ECE staff roles, which called for new trainings and relationship building, and the limited decision-making authority of individual ECE providers without organizational approval.

*"I wanted to share some updates since you helped us so much to get here...We went from packaged peanut butter-and-jelly, fries, and fruit cups to fresh food! I am attaching a photo of the meals we had yesterday... one of our littles that would never touch green beans last year is now eating seconds because of the new way they are presented."*

*-Email from Lil' Winders Preschool Director to the AZ Health Zone Yuma*

**Contribution.** Throughout the FY21-25 plan cycle, the AZ Health Zone Yuma leveraged their extensive Go NAPSACC training, expertise, and relationships with ECE providers to catalyze Go NAPSACC enrollment and changemaking. After recruiting San Luis centers to register in the Go NAPSACC portal, LIA staff tailored their technical assistance using a mix of in-person, email, and phone calls. This support covered a range of topics: completing assessments, goal setting, action planning, training for ECE staff, resource sharing, help with implementation, and general check-ins.

Across topics and providers, LIA support helped to buffer the severity of emergent challenges, for example by adding regular onboarding opportunities and continuity of Go NAPSACC support when ECE staff roles shifted or provider turnover occurred. A consistent LIA presence also helped to maintain progress during the ebbs and flows experienced during PSE changemaking.

Our mixed methods analysis of Go NAPSACC reports, LIA narratives, and interview data also showed that the way providers progressed varied by the Go NAPSACC topic they were working on:

❖ Providers' progress with the **CHILD NUTRITION** and **INFANT & CHILD PHYSICAL ACTIVITY** topics was closely linked to the centers completing the Go NAPSACC improvement cycle using the online portal, with LIA encouragement.

❖ Providers' progress with the **FARM TO ECE** topic was less closely tied to Go NAPSACC portal use and more closely tied to the AZ Health Zone Yuma's customized support, including behaviorally focused trainings for center staff; family engagement and education; ad hoc gardening support; connecting the ECE centers with Master Gardeners; and providing dual language (Spanish and English) technical assistance.

**Significance.** This outcome demonstrates that unique combinations of three conditions facilitated PSE changemaking among ECE centers in a closely connected border community: (1) ECE provider engagement in the Go NAPSACC improvement process, (2) consistent LIA support for Go NAPSACC—including tailored technical assistance by topic and ECE site, and (3) empowering site-level ECE staff to make changes.



**"Estrellita Child Care advanced from a Go NAPSACC FARM TO ECE score of 47% to 82%, or 'leading the way.' We provided garden beds to help them start, and they planted herbs and vegetables, which they used in meals—radishes on Gallina Pinta, herbs on pasta...We engaged with families, facilitating a cooking demo for parents with the garden herbs. We also asked parents what was most important for them to see implemented [photo, left], and they selected nutrition environment ...In the end, the Director expressed gratitude for the work we did to support them and said our technical assistance was very important because it gave the teachers an 'I can do that' confidence to move forward."**

-AZ Health Zone Yuma Narrative

**Outcome.** In response to the expressed needs and interests of Yuma family child care homes (FCCHs), the AZ Health Zone Yuma established a regional **FARM TO ECE** learning collaborative for FCCHs [ST7].

## KEY PARTNERS

- Alicia's Day Care
- Angela's Daycare
- Angel's Place
- Five Little Stars
- La Casita de los Peques
- Little Rascals Home Day Care
- Lydia's Day Care
- Mi Casita Day Care
- Pequeñas Bendiciones
- The King's Treasures
- Yadi's Group Home
- Yumi's Childcare and Preschool

**Description.** Early in this program cycle, the AZ Health Zone Yuma observed that peer-to-peer sharing nurtured PSE progress. They also learned that those who ran historically underserved FCCHs often had more autonomy to pursue PSE changes than other provider types, that many FCCHs already had strong peer networks, and that FCH were generally hungry for group engagement and technical assistance. In response, the AZ Health Zone Yuma began to explore FCCH-focused learning collaboratives, which could provide tailored support and consistent communication across many sites despite the LIA's limited capacity to connect regularly with individual providers. In October 2024, the LIA launched a survey to gauge FCCH interest and topical preferences. Findings revealed broad enthusiasm for participating in a learning collaborative focused on Farm to ECE—in particular, gardens.

In January 2025, the AZ Health Zone Yuma partnered with Arizona's State Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Program to recruit FCCHs into a garden-focused learning collaborative. Twelve providers enrolled, all SNAP eligible, with four included in the LIA's Community Action Plans.

## RECRUITING FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES

**"They call each other and say, 'Hey this opportunity came along. Would you be interested? I'm doing it.' Word goes around. And in my experience it's easier to work with people who are running the place, easier to make changes... They want to progress. They want to do things right."**

*-Interview with the AZ Health Zone Yuma*

"What I liked the most was the collaboration with the staff and other members, and all the tips on what veggies to plant and in what season. We gave each other lots of ideas."

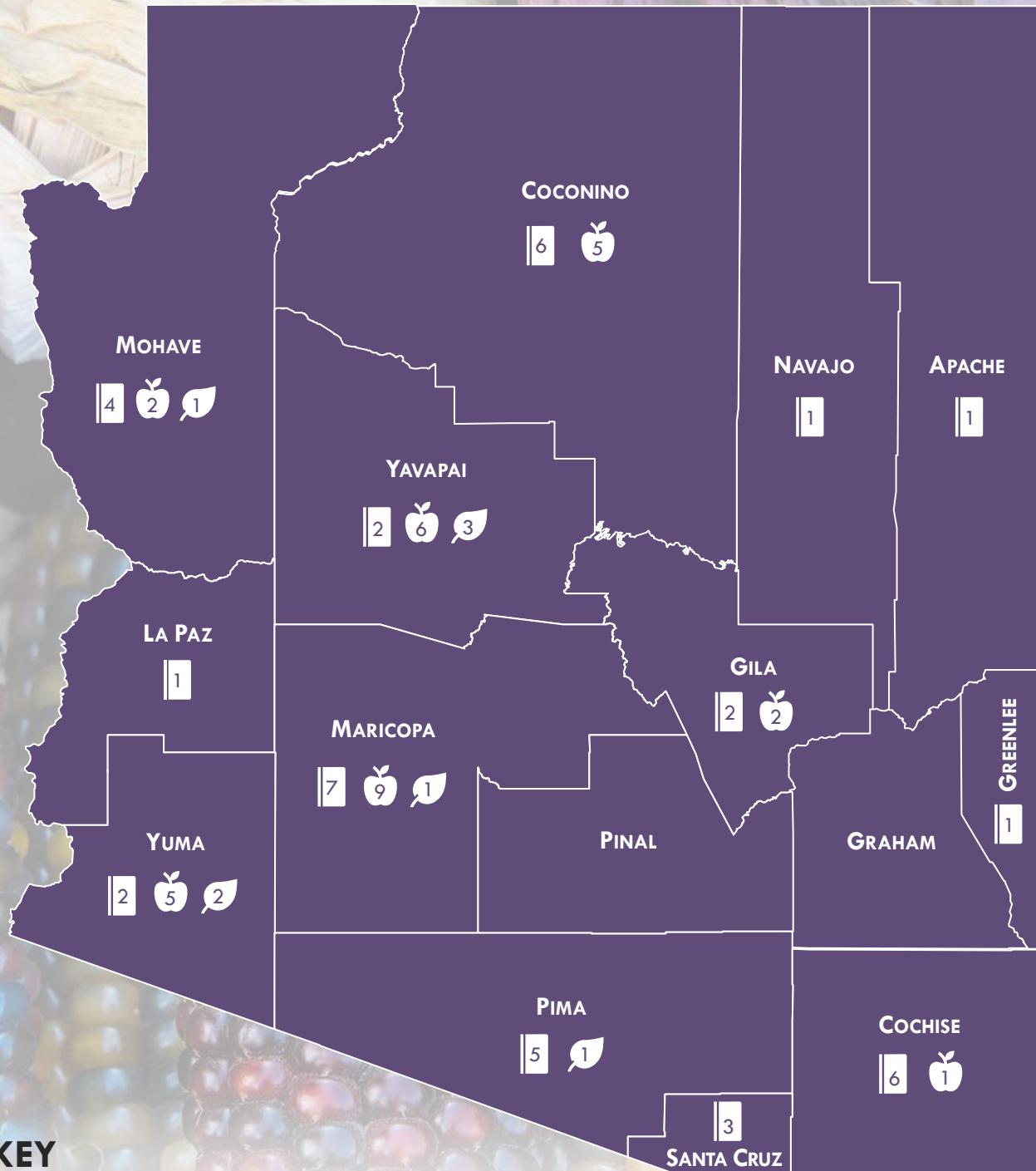
*-Interview with Alicia's Day Care*

**Contribution.** The AZ Health Zone Yuma responded to the observed needs and assets of ECE providers by developing a formal method of inquiry—the FCCH survey—to inform next steps. They also leveraged SPAN's interest in promoting Farm to ECE, allowing the LIA to expand their reach beyond the FCCHs in their Community Action Plans, and to expand their capacity for in-person technical assistance by adding a SPAN staff person. The AZ Health Zone Yuma then combined their gardening expertise with their prior experience in other topical Go NAPSACC learning collaboratives to co-design and co-implement a locally tailored Go NAPSACC **FARM TO ECE** learning collaborative with SPAN.

**Significance.** This outcome demonstrates how a community-based agency can harness its unique connectedness with local ECE providers and state agencies to enhance Farm to ECE changemaking among historically underserved FCCHs.

# School & Other Youth-Based Systems

Support the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies that promote nutrition and physical activity in School & Other Youth-Based Systems

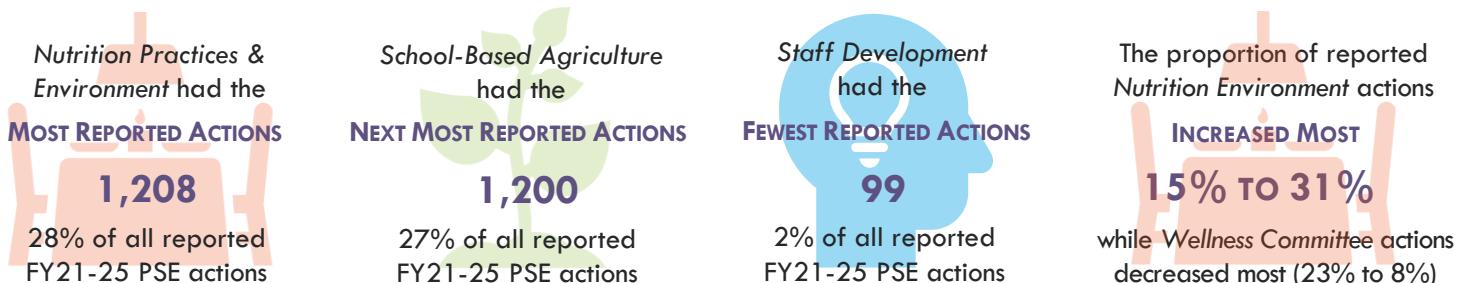


## KEY

- = # matched WellSAT 3.0 Scorecards, 10/1/19 – 4/30/25
- = # matched SLM Scorecards, 10/1/20 – 5/9/25
- = # DIG in Schools tools submitted 10/1/24 – 5/20/25

# School Systems Activity Patterns

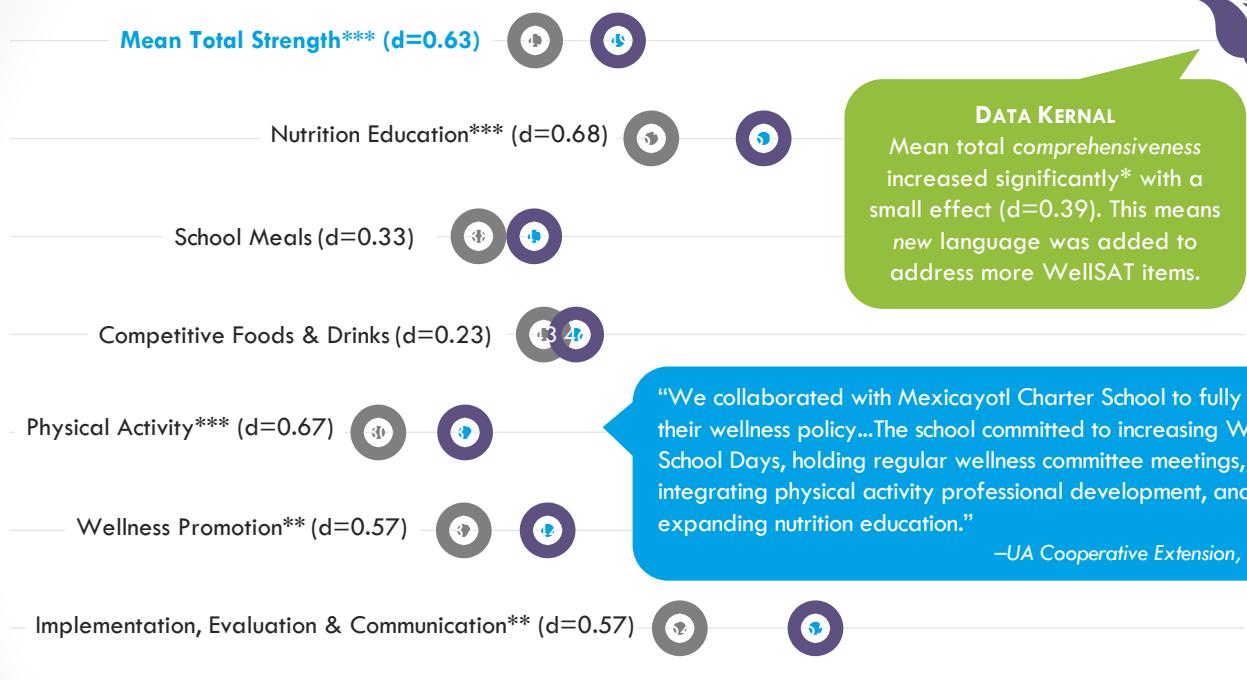
From FY21-25 (10/1/20 – 4/30/25), Local Implementing Agencies (LIAs) reported their unduplicated policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) actions in SEEDS. Of the eight AZ Health Zone School & Other Youth-Based Systems activities:



## FY21-25 WellSAT 3.0 Findings

We used the Wellness School Assessment Tool, or **WELLSAT 3.0**, to assess the quality of school districts' local wellness policies (LWPs). The confidence level for this evaluation was set at 90% ( $p \leq 0.10$ ) due to the modest sample size ( $n=41$ ).

From **BEFORE** to **AFTER** SNAP-Ed support for revising LWPs, the mean total policy strength increased significantly, with a medium effect size ( $n=41$ ). Scores ranged from 0 (worst) to 100 (best).

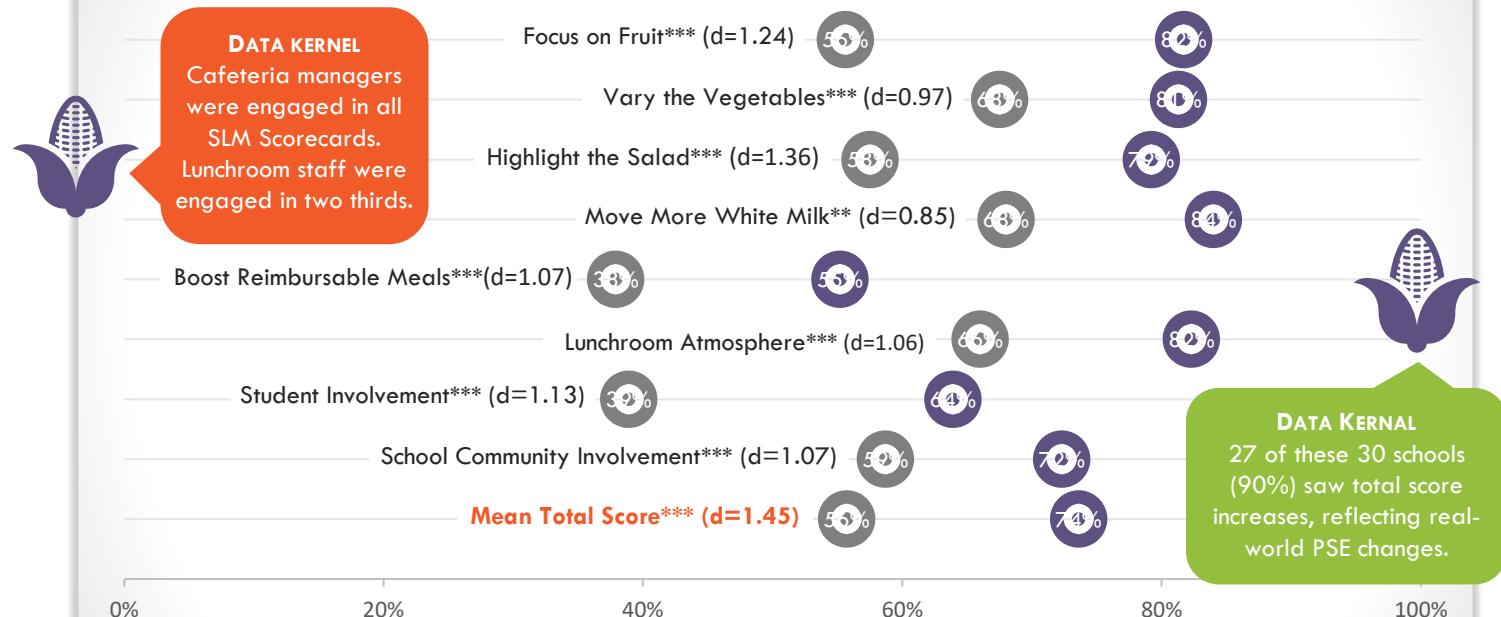


\* $p \leq 0.10$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$

# FY21-25 SLM Scorecard Findings

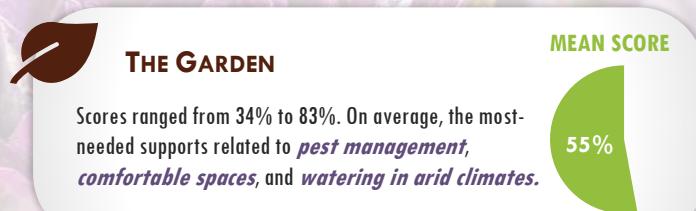
We used the **SMARTER LUNCHROOMS MOVEMENT (SLM) SCORECARD** to assess the lunchroom environment before and after the SNAP-Ed supported SLM, setting the confidence level at 90% ( $p \leq 0.10$ ) due to the modest sample size ( $n=30$ ).

**From BEFORE to AFTER SLM support, all Scorecard sections increased significantly with large effect sizes (n=30).** Scores were calculated as a % of the maximum possible score and ranged from 0% (worst) to 100% (best).



## FY25 DIG in Schools Findings

We used the **DEVELOPING INTEGRATED GARDENS (DIG) IN SCHOOLS TOOL** to assess the integration of garden programs into schools' overall structure and function. This pre-intervention overview summarizes section results for **8 schools in 5 counties**. Section scores before engaging in the DIG in Schools Cycle of Change were calculated as percents (out of 100%).



## Tailoring School Supports in Maricopa Nurtures Nutrition-Related PSE Change

The Maricopa County Department of Public Health, operating as the AZ Health Zone MCDPH, has a long history of supporting schools across diverse communities. This program cycle, Camelback East/Encanto school districts were especially engaged with the AZ Health Zone's evaluation-implementation cycles. To better understand their progress, we asked: What nutrition-related PSE changes did these

districts make between FY21 and FY25? What was unique about each district (e.g., culture, assets, challenges), and how did AZ Health Zone MCDPH staff support each one to effectively facilitate change? Here, we report progress with three school districts in the Camelback/East Encanto community and describe the overall significance of these combined outcomes.

**Outcome.** From FY21-25, the [Creighton Elementary School District](#) started an active Local Wellness Policy (LWP) Committee [ST7], initiated a data collection system to track and improve school-level LWP implementation [MT5], launched a districtwide USDA Smart Snacks plan [MT5], expanded their school garden program [LT5], and promoted newly available free meals from the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) [MT5, LT5].

**Description.** The action-oriented Creighton District focused the combined strength of its Child Nutrition & Wellness Team ([background image](#)), skilled nutrition educators, and local AZ Health Zone and [Creighton Community Foundation](#) partners to improve nutrition practices and environments across its nine schools. Key changes included:

**A NEW LWP COMMITTEE & TRACKING SYSTEM.** Established in 2022-23, the committee aimed to enhance schools' awareness of and compliance with the Arizona Department of Education (ADE)'s LWP requirements. By the next year, they launched a tracking system (survey) to systematically collect LWP implementation data from each school.

**DISTRICTWIDE INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE THE USDA'S SMART SNACKS & FREE MEALS.** In 2024-25, the LWP Committee sought to improve schools' competitive food and beverage practices. They developed and disseminated guidance on what Smart Snacks are, why they exist, how schools can incorporate them into food and drink offerings, and where to go for help. They also began bilingual CEP promotion when schools became eligible to serve free meals in 2024.

**SCHOOL GARDEN PROGRAM EXPANSION.** The district improved their physical gardens; expanded nutrition education into afterschool clubs and garden programs; and enhanced student and teacher connections with the local food system.

**Contribution.** The AZ Health Zone MCDPH was especially sensitive to Creighton's internal momentum and robust expertise, taking the district's lead and focusing support on its expressed interests and needs. LIA staff referenced the [Spectrum of Prevention](#) to plan and track their efforts over the five-year program cycle, which included:



### INFLUENCING POLICY & LEGISLATION

The Creighton LWP committee chose not to work here due to the need for additional legal review.



### CHANGING ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

The AZ Health Zone MCDPH provided topical and logistics support for the LWP survey, Smart Snacks effort, garden education, and CEP promotion.



### FOSTERING COALITIONS & NETWORKS

The AZ Health Zone MCDPH provided stipends and logistics support to the LWP Committee and worked with the Creighton Community Foundation on gardens.



### EDUCATING PROVIDERS

The LIA provided trainings and technical assistance on LWP, Smart Snacks, gardening, and more.



### PROMOTING COMMUNITY EDUCATION

The AZ Health Zone MCDPH helped to plan and implement community events and family outreach.



### GROWING INDIVIDUAL KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS

The LIA responded to Creighton's expressed interest to have them offer gardening education for students.

**"The district already had internal nutrition programming, [but] interest in garden-based education was strong. [So, we] partnered with garden coordinators and the Creighton Community Foundation to incorporate nutrition education into afterschool clubs and garden settings."**

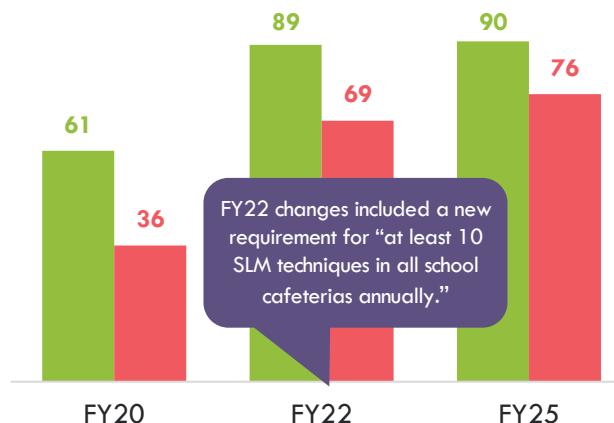
-AZ Health Zone MCDPH

**Outcome.** From FY21-25, the [Madison Elementary School District](#) improved their written LWP [MT5], adopted the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement (SLM) across all district schools [MT5], achieved and maintained the SLM's gold-level status [LT5], expanded their Farm to School program [LT5], and achieved national recognition from the USDA and School Nutrition Association [LT7].

**Description.** Backed by the school board and Wellness Committee, the eight-school Madison Elementary District strengthened its LWP (right) and tied the revisions to school-level implementation. By FY22, enhanced LWP guidelines and district support led to a dedicated SLM coordinator and districtwide SLM adoption, including in three SNAP-Ed partner schools. Since then, the SLM's improvement process has been completed annually, with all schools achieving SLM "gold" status for healthier environments. The district also expanded Farm to School efforts by adding local foods, incorporating farm visits, replacing its displaced garden with an indoor tower, and integrating nutrition and garden education into science and culinary lessons. These efforts led to national recognition, including the School Nutrition Association's [2023 Cafeteria Manager of the Year Award](#) and the USDA's [2024 Healthy Meals Incentives Innovation in Nutrition Education Award](#).

**Madison Elementary School District improved their Local Wellness Policy's COMPREHENSIVENESS and STRENGTH throughout the FY21-25 program cycle.**

The WellSAT scores below range from 1 (worst) to 100 (best).



**Contribution.** From FY21-25, the AZ Health Zone MCDPH supported multi-level, multi-component changes made by Madison:

"I personally had teachers reach out to say, 'Thank you so much! Our kids are so much better behaved now that [they have a longer lunch time].'"  
-Madison Wellness Coordinator

#### LWP REVISIONS

LIA staff guided the Madison LWP Committee in revising their policy using the AZ Health Zone WellSAT-based process. Changes included additions like adopting SLM strategies and inspired the enforcement of long-time policies such as offering all students at least 20 minutes to eat lunch. The LIA wrote, "Key updates included stronger emphasis on nutrition education, physical activity, and mental health, with new guidelines to improve healthy food availability in cafeterias and promote physical activity inside and outside classrooms."



#### SLM CHANGES

The AZ Health Zone MCDPH introduced the district to the SLM process and provided monthly trainings, tailored assistance, & resources every year from FY22-25. The LIA also helped secure a mobile breakfast cart to revitalize declining meal participation. As a result, the Wellness Coordinator said, "We [now] encourage recess before lunch. We've noticed less food waste and more fruits and vegetables being taken. And teachers have noticed students are far more ready to learn."



#### FARM TO SCHOOL GROWTH

Throughout this program cycle, the AZ Health Zone MCDPH provided robust support for Madison's local food and school garden initiatives. LIA staff assisted Farm to School grant applications; furnished garden tools and the middle school's garden tower; and helped to coordinate Farm to School month activities such as seed libraries, farmers market participation, and taste tests of local produce for students and the broader school district community. LIA staff also helped to integrate garden education into culinary classes.



#### EDUCATIONAL EXPANSION

Each year, the AZ Health Zone MCDPH provided nutrition and gardening education to all grades, K-12, in support of the district's goals. Over time, the LIA's indoor and outdoor lessons with the 5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade Garden Club students were linked to science and culinary classes, building students' food-related skills through hands-on opportunities and behaviorally focused education. Having worked with LIA staff for over five years, one Food Service Manager remarked, "There is no way we could do any of this without the AZ Health Zone."

**Outcome.** From FY21-25, the [Osborn Elementary Schools District](#) activated its LWP Committee, internal expertise, and local partnerships [ST7] to enhance the district's food pantry program [MT5]; develop a local food access map [MT5]; promote free meal participation across all district schools [MT5, LT5], grow school garden programs [LT5]; and achieve national recognition as one of America's Healthiest Schools [LT7].

**Description.** From FY21-25, the six-school Osborn Elementary District harnessed the collective power of internal and external groups to advance their nutrition initiatives, including the district's LWP Committee, dedicated Child Nutrition Department, in-house dietitian who provides nutrition education, lead social worker who runs Osborn's Food Pantry, gym teacher who supports Native health, and local partners like the AZ Health Zone MCDPH, [St. Mary's Food Bank](#), [Let's Go Compost](#), and community food advocates. As a result, the district grew numerous food access and nutrition education initiatives and was [recognized in 2024](#) with multiple America's Healthiest Schools awards for Improving Nutrition & Food Access and LWP Implementation.

**Contribution.** During this program cycle, the AZ Health Zone MCDPH joined the district's support system, advancing Osborn's priorities even further and responding to emergent needs:

#### LWP COMMITTEE

Post-COVID, the AZ Health Zone MCDPH helped Osborn to revitalize their LWP Committee and provided technical assistance for the group's nutrition efforts. Since FY22, the LIA has reimbursed committee members for their participation, provided trainings on LWP and other topics during committee meetings, and given as-needed support for LWP implementation.

"The [AZ Health Zone] gives the committee stipends. It helps with getting people on board...This year has been better than last year, and last year was better than the year before. People are becoming more consistent. They have more ideas about what they want to do."

-Osborn Dietician & Chef

#### FREE MEALS PROMOTION

All Osborn schools participate in CEP. After learning the district sought to bolster waning post-COVID meal participation, LIA staff partnered with the Child Nutrition Department to revamp flyers, promote meal program strengths (e.g., scratch cooking),



develop social media posts, and create bilingual "Free Meals" banners (image).



#### FOOD ACCESS MAP & PANTRIES

In FY23, the LIA facilitated the development of an Osborn food access map spanning a half-mile radius around the district's boundaries (image above). To date, Osborn has shared this resource with their LWP Committee, district social workers, and publicly on their Child Nutrition webpage. Of note, the map includes the location of Osborn school food pantries. After a pantry tour in FY24, the AZ Health Zone MCDPH initiated support by providing shelving, carts, and posters to enhance the environment; grant-writing assistance; and culturally relevant, bilingual recipes and nutrition tips for distributed food items.

#### SCHOOL GARDEN EXPANSION

The AZ Health Zone MCDPH customized their garden assistance by responding to Osborn's direct requests and offering a menu of garden-related curricula. As a result, LIA staff connected the district with Let's Go Compost, linked them to a local grower with family food distribution experience (a garden grant requirement), and provided seeds and starter plants to support the Junior Master Gardener lessons being taught.

**Overall Significance.** Taken together, these three comprehensive outcomes highlight the importance of tailoring approaches to effectively support school wellness initiatives, even among districts within the same community. Throughout the five-year program cycle, the AZ Health Zone MCDPH customized its nutrition-related programming by honoring each district's unique assets, challenges, and priorities. This, in turn, spurred robust, collaborative PSE successes.

# Growing a School Garden Program in Rural Greenlee

Located in one of Arizona's most rural counties, the Duncan Unified School District serves [nearly 400 students](#) across two schools. The AZ Health Zone program in Greenlee is funded through the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension and supports both schools, reaching many of the

town's [roughly 1,000 residents](#) with school-based initiatives. This program cycle, the AZ Health Zone Greenlee partnered with Duncan Elementary School to create and implement a 5th Grade Garden Club that bridged garden programming across grade levels.

## The Evolution of Duncan Elementary School's 5th Grade Garden Club



2022-23 [ST7]

The AZ Health Zone Greenlee taught *Junior Master Gardener* to the 5th grade class. Students' varied engagement levels posed challenges: About half of the students were deeply interested and half were not.

August 2023 [ST5,6]

The AZ Health Zone partnered with the 5th grade teacher to address engagement and ways to enhance the district's garden programming. They developed a formal "opt-in" garden club, including student agreements.

2023-24 [MT5]

Upon approval, the 5th Grade Garden Club launched. Student invitations included permission slips, and half (14) of the class joined. During science classes, these students split out twice per month to learn and garden.

August 2024 [MT5]

The teacher and AZ Health Zone staff reviewed year 1 successes & challenges. They maintained the program structure, adjusted the lesson timing, and further connected Club activities with younger grades for mentorship.

2024-25 [LT5,10]

Another 14 students joined the Club, starting with in-class learning and moving to hands-on activities and Kinder mentorship from Dec-May. The 6th grade agricultural elective saw an increase in sign-ups, and students entered with more skills.

## ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL CHANGES

**Outcome.** Begun in fall 2023, the Duncan Elementary School's 5th Grade Garden Club has formalized garden activities, bridging programming across grade levels and bolstering sustainability [LT5,10].

a formalized part of the science curriculum has also bolstered its sustainability during periods of organizational change.

**Contribution.** The AZ Health Zone Greenlee's Program Coordinator co-created the Club with the school's 5th grade teacher. She proposed the idea after recognizing an existing challenge, and the two then attained the required administrative approval. Together, the Coordinator and teacher developed and implemented an "opt-in" recruitment strategy, including a parent/guardian letter and student agreement. Over the past two years, the AZ Health Zone Greenlee has led the Garden Club portion of the science period, while the 5th grade teacher has instructed an alternative curriculum. In addition, the AZ Health Zone Greenlee has provided technical garden assistance, connected Duncan Elementary to other expert gardeners, and shared materials that enhance the gardening experience for all grades, K-5.

**Significance.** This organizational-level outcome illustrates how a successful systems transformation can emerge from the AZ Health Zone's intentional, long-term collaboration with a partner school. The effort resulted in the garden program's deeper integration into both the elementary school's regular K-5 activities, and to the agricultural programming in higher grade levels.

**"The kindergarteners love when the big kids come and work with them. It builds a big sense of community."**

-5th Grade Garden Club teacher

This year, signs of success include school staff observations that the program is *helping establish* greater connections between older and younger students and *an increase in the number of 6th grade agricultural elective sign-ups* from the Garden Club cohort. In addition, establishing the Club as

## INDIVIDUAL LEVEL CHANGES

**Outcome.** After participating in the 5th Grade Garden Club, students have demonstrated improvements across multiple health-related indicators, including: knowledge of the plant cycle and food systems; technical skills in gardening; teamwork, peer socialization, and mentorship abilities; general willingness to engage in difficult tasks and overcome challenges (i.e., resilience); and expanded interests, including trying new vegetables [MT1<sub>d</sub>] and participating in future garden opportunities.

**Description.** This program cycle, the Duncan Elementary School's 5th Grade Garden Club participants included 14 students each in the 2023-24 and 2024-25 cohorts. During classes, the AZ Health Zone Program Coordinator introduces students to gardening concepts in the fall using the *Junior Master Gardening* curriculum. Students begin indoor germination in the winter, and after winter break, they celebrate the emerging sprouts and learn about transplantation. By the spring, the students practice what they learned, transplanting the growing plants to the school's outdoor garden and preparing garden spaces for the younger grade levels. They harvest what they have grown by the end of the school year, clipping and trying the vegetables and taking harvests home to their families. In this way, the fifth graders not only experience the full life cycle of the plants, but they actively participate in nurturing that cycle.

**"The principal has noticed that when kids go to Garden Club, they tend to be better behaved."**

-5<sup>th</sup> Grade Garden Club teacher

To date, school staff have reported that *participating students demonstrate new garden-related knowledge and skills*, including how to use a variety of gardening tools; understanding how food grows; and recognizing when and how to plant, transplant, and harvest different species. In addition, the AZ Health Zone Greenlee saw *improvements in students' social skills* (e.g., working in teams, mentoring younger students, self-selecting unfamiliar partners) *and resiliency* (described by the Program Coordinator as a willingness to "do hard things, like removing Bermuda grass"). In April 2025, the AZ Health Zone Evaluation Team documented many of these behaviors during direct observation of the Club activities: students were at ease using gardening tools, held knowledgeable discussions about the plants and crops, worked in mutually-supportive pairs to accomplish tasks, and found safe and effective ways to overcome physical discomforts like the heat so that they could complete garden tasks rather than opt out.



Other improvements included staff observations that *neurodivergent and neurotypical students' showed new curiosity about and signs of benefitting from hands-on versus more conventional (i.e., didactic) learning methods*.

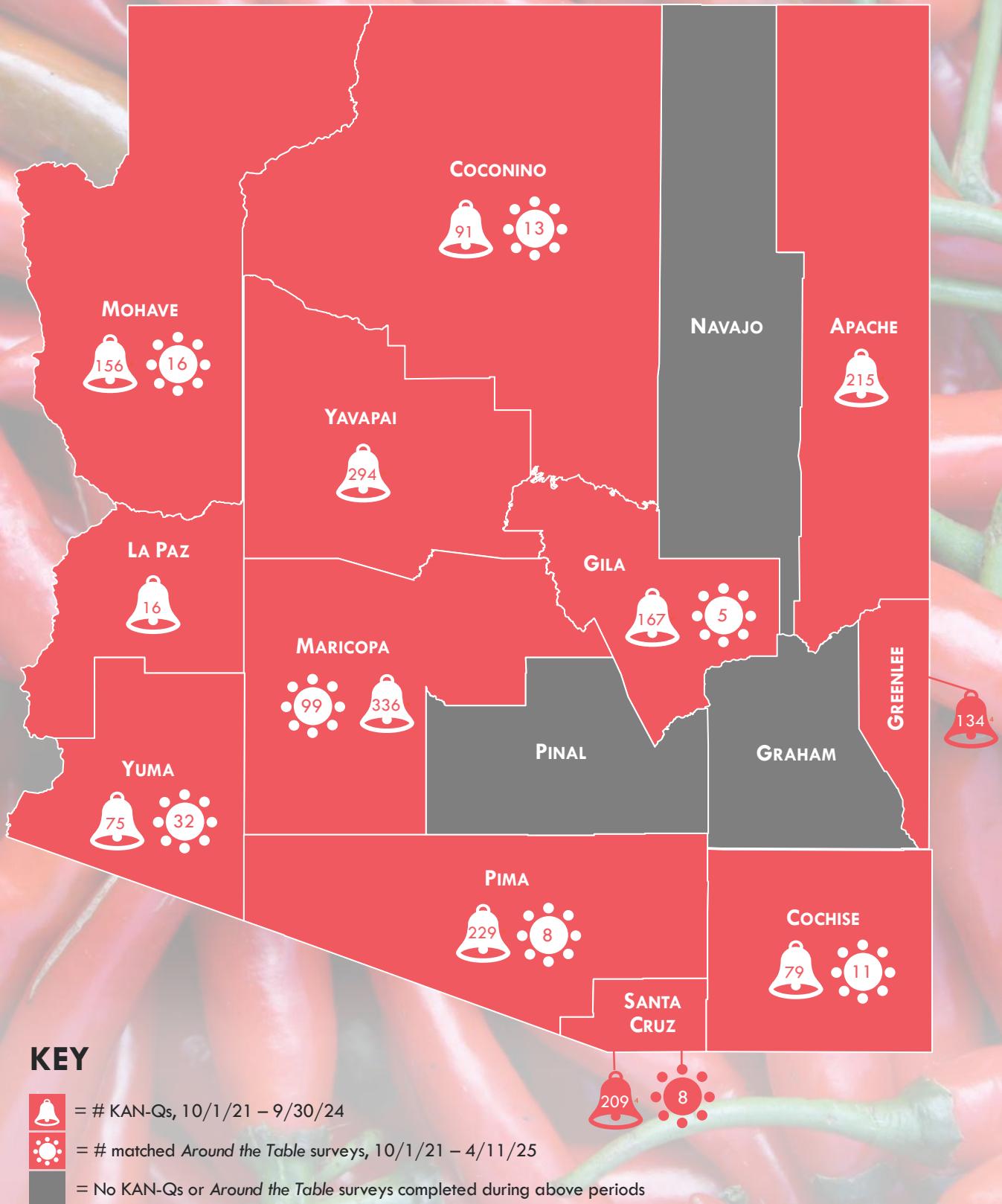
**Contribution.** The Garden Club classes are taught by the AZ Health Zone Greenlee, who introduced the school to *Junior Master Gardener* and provides technical assistance to maintain the garden.



**Significance.** This individual-level outcome showcases how Garden Club participation improved students' health-related outcomes through SNAP-Ed's evidence-based, behaviorally focused education. It also illustrates how the AZ Health Zone contributed to positive outcomes in a very rural community with limited food-related resource access.

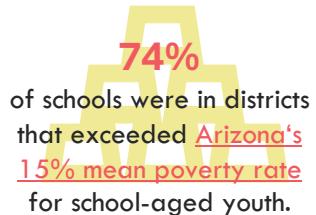
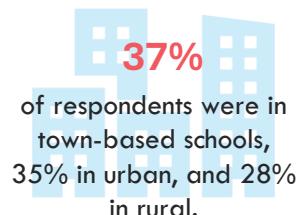
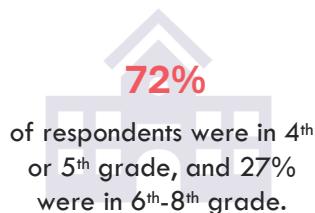
# Individual-Level Outcomes

Assess the nutrition and physical activity outcomes for those reached by AZ Health Zone programming, including school-aged youth and adults



# Assessing Student Behaviors

From FY22-24, Local Implementing Agencies (LIAs) worked with partner schools to have students complete the **KIDS' ACTIVITY & NUTRITION QUESTIONNAIRE (KAN-Q)**, providing a snapshot in time of students' eating and physical activity behaviors. Across three years, 2,001 KAN-Qs were completed in 31 schools (see [Map](#)).

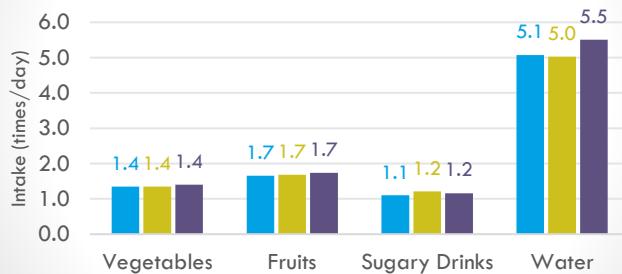


## FY22-24 KAN-Q Findings

The confidence level for this evaluation was set at 99% ( $p \leq 0.01$ ) due to the large sample size ( $n > 600$ ).

\*\* $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$

Self-reported eating and drinking behaviors were consistent across the **FY22** to **FY23** to **FY24** cohorts.

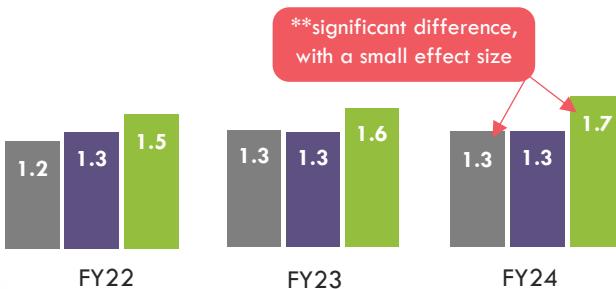


On average, students reported fewer physical activity bouts "last week" in **FY22** and **FY23** than in **FY24**.



### Geographical Differences in Fruit & Veggie Intake

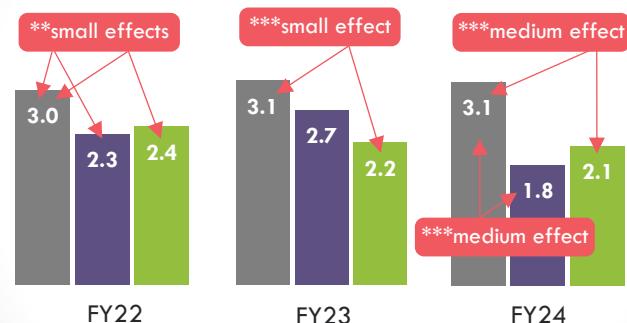
For vegetables, students in **RURAL AREAS** and **TOWNS** reported higher mean intake (as "times yesterday") compared with students in **CITIES** across all years:



For fruits, respondents in **CITIES** or **RURAL AREAS** reported higher mean intake (as "times yesterday") in all years compared to students in **TOWNS**. However, these differences were not statistically significant.

### Geographical Differences in Sedentary Behavior

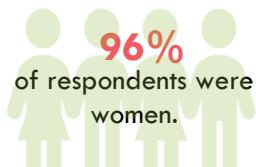
Across years, students in **RURAL AREAS** and **TOWNS** reported fewer sedentary hours spent on electronics "yesterday" compared with students in **CITIES**.



There were no consistent geographical patterns across years in the amount of times students reported watching television, asked separately from the electronics item.

# Assessing Adults with the ATT

From FY21-FY25, five LIAs across eight counties used the **AROUND THE TABLE (ATT) NOURISHING FAMILIES** survey to measure changes in adults' food and nutrition behaviors. Across five years, 192 matched pre-post surveys were completed (see [Map](#)).



**30%**  
of respondents  
reported receiving  
SNAP benefits.

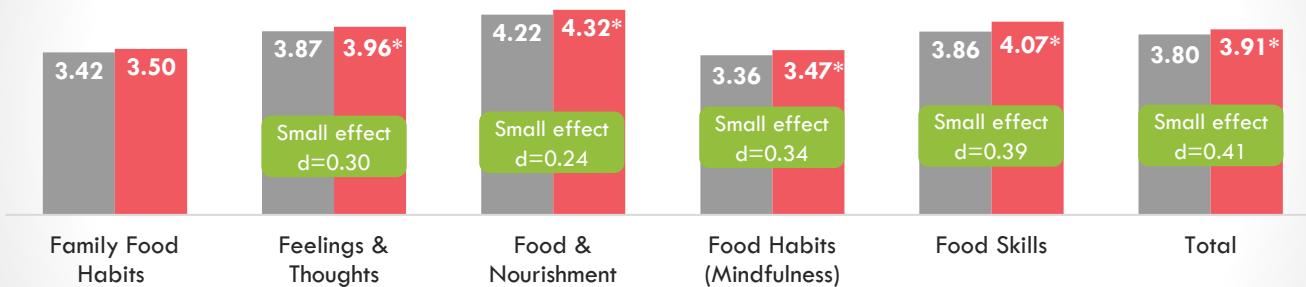
**74%**  
of respondents were  
Hispanic and 60% of  
surveys were completed  
in Spanish.

**73%**  
of respondents had  
children under 18 and  
59% were between  
the ages of 30-49.

## FY21-25 ATT Survey Findings

The ATT survey consists of five sections that assess family food practices, emotional wellbeing, personal attitudes toward nourishment, mindful eating habits, and food preparation and budgeting skills. The confidence level for this evaluation was set at 95% ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) due to the sample size ( $n=192$ ).

Mean scores for four ATT survey sections significantly increased from **PRE** to **POST**, with small effects. Food Skills had the highest gain. Scores ranged from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).



\* $p \leq 0.05$

Scores for the four internally-focused ATT survey sections were significantly correlated with scores for various Family Food Habits. The lines below illustrate which sections were correlated with which behavior items at the post-survey. The thickness represents the strength of the association.

### SURVEY SECTION

Food & Nourishment

Feelings & Thoughts

Food Habits (Mindfulness)

Food Skills

### FAMILY FOOD HABIT BEHAVIOR ITEMS



How often does your household eat together?



How often is green salad served?



How often are vegetables served?



How often are sugary drinks served?

Two sections, Feelings & Thoughts and Food Skills, were also significantly correlated with caregivers having a conversation with their children about healthy eating habits in the past 30 days.

## Community-Responsive Around the Table Classes Have Ripple Effects Across Maricopa County

This program cycle, the AZ Health Zone Maricopa, funded through the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, leveraged key partnerships with schools and community centers to conduct over twenty *Around the Table* (ATT) classes throughout the county. We asked: (1) What strategies has AZ Health Zone Maricopa used to support

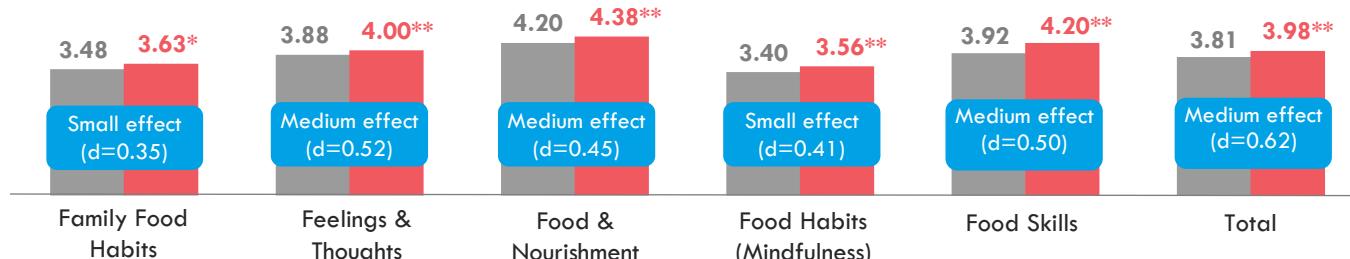
strong participation in the ATT series throughout the program cycle and (2) What impacts resulted from resident participation in ATT? The two harvested outcomes summarize how AZ Health Zone Maricopa's community-responsive delivery of ATT had an impact in school and household environments across the county.

**Outcome.** Residents who participated in the ATT curriculum demonstrated improved food- and nutrition-related behaviors. These positive changes were supported by AZ Health Zone Maricopa's community-responsive approach to delivering the curriculum.

**Description.** AZ Health Zone Maricopa staff administered pre- and post-surveys ( $n=97$  matched) for the ATT curriculum to assess participants' readiness and capacity to adopt wellness behaviors across five sections. Improvements were observed on all ATT

sections, with the most notable gain in the Food Skills section. These results reflect the effectiveness of the staff's approach to recruiting for and delivering the curriculum.

**Mean scores from AZ Health Zone Maricopa-led ATT curriculum survey sections improved significantly from PRE to POST ( $n=97$ ).** Scores ranged from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).



\* $p\leq 0.05$ , \*\* $p\leq 0.01$

**Contribution.** AZ Health Zone Maricopa staff incorporated community-responsive approaches focused on:



**Participant Recruitment.** Staff consulted residents at school events to learn about topics they cared about. This feedback guided staff to use the ATT curriculum. Based on what was shared, staff renamed the series to "Nutrition & Managing Stress" on flyers to better resonate with community residents. Class sessions were also available based on residents' schedules.



**Tailored Class Adaptations.** Staff developed tailored curriculum PowerPoint presentations to serve as a visual support during the ATT classes. They also made adaptations to ensure the curriculum was accessible to individuals with physical disabilities or limited literacy. This included reading discussion questions aloud, simplifying complex language (e.g., rephrasing complex terms like "resilience" in Spanish), and offering alternatives for handling and cooking various foods.



**Creation of a Trauma-Informed Safe Space.** New staff completed trauma-informed professional development trainings and shadowed experienced team members to gain confidence navigating sensitive conversations during the ATT classes. In addition, staff prioritized building trust and safety with participants through trauma-aware practices during each class.

## CREATION OF A TRAUMA-INFORMED SAFE SPACE

Throughout the program cycle, AZ Health Zone Maricopa staff:

**SHARED GROUP AGREEMENTS** to remind participants about confidentiality, non-judgment, and self-care. These agreements were revisited at the start of each class where participants were invited to read them aloud and refer to them throughout each class.

**MODELED VULNERABILITY** where staff shared personal experiences first, which helped encourage others to speak. Participants were reminded that sharing was always optional.

**GUIDED CURRICULUM CONTENT** around participants' preferences, from food demonstrations and recipe ideas to discussion topics. This gave participants the opportunity to share ideas around their interests.

**Significance.** Through AZ Health Zone Maricopa's approach to ATT, participants reported feeling seen and supported to make sustainable changes in their

food and nutrition habits. These practices had a broader effect, where the curriculum also helped foster stronger connections at school and at home:

**Participants who participated in ATT gained confidence in their cooking skills, became more willing to try new ingredients, and learned how nutritious options can be quick and inexpensive.**

"[The curriculum] has given parents the confidence to try new things and cook it at home. A lot of them have tried the recipes at home, and they continue using them. It gave them the chance to try different foods, probably something that we would have never tried if [AZ Health Zone] hadn't brought it in."

-Elementary School Parent Liaison

**At home, caregivers who participated in ATT exposed their children to new food and involved them in meal preparation.**

"I have learned many recipes that have helped my children eat more vegetables. For example, before I took these classes my son used to tell me 'I'm not a worm so why should I eat veggies' and 'I'm not a bunny so why should I eat carrots'. Now he eats more and I'm so glad that he is trying new food!"

-Parent Participant

**Social connection between participants improved, where residents exchanged recipes and shared challenges around food, caregiving, and wellbeing.**

"I think what kept me coming back was that it was a small community. It was probably about four to six of us. We started to build that connection with other parents and realized the similar challenges we have with our kids or with ourselves. So, it felt very communal."

-Parent Participant

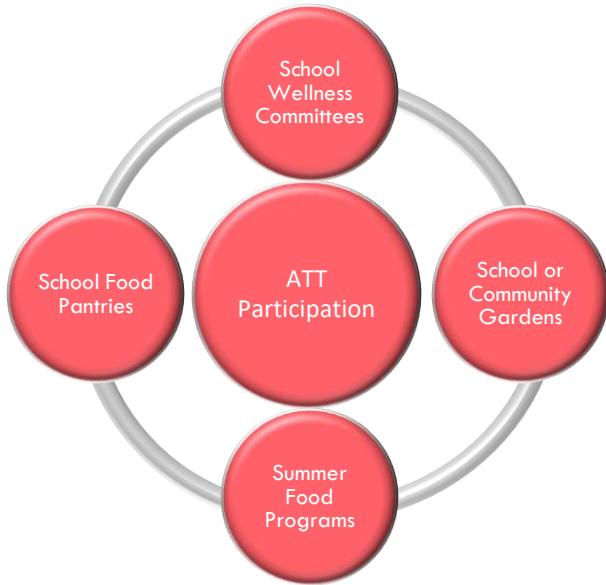
**Beyond food and nutrition skills, participants learned mindfulness and stress management techniques that resonated with them and their families.**

"My students can have a hard time focusing or have a lot of hyperactivity. I think [the breathing activities] just gave them other opportunities to regulate and kind of calm themselves. Just learning to step back and take a break. And it's fun to do it with food!"

-High School Transition Coordinator

**Outcome.** AZ Health Zone Maricopa's facilitation of the ATT curriculum helped caregivers adopt self-care practices and become engaged in school-based policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) initiatives.

**Description.** Participation in the ATT curriculum offered caregivers the opportunity to step away from their daily responsibilities and engage with their school community. Through the ATT curriculum, caregivers began to normalize prioritizing time for themselves, including attending ATT classes, connecting with other caregivers, preparing meals ahead of time, and making space for rest and nourishment. These personal shifts helped foster involvement in the school community where caregivers began to volunteer for events and become involved with PSE initiatives:



“Since we did [ATT], we've had more involvement. Parents are coming and they have been supporting the school. They've been volunteering! They are feeling more comfortable to say 'Yeah, I have to go home and clean, but I can do that for an hour.' It has made a difference.”

-Elementary School Parent Liaison

“[ATT] really impacted the parents in a positive way. It impacted them to start their own school garden. And if [a school garden] isn't possible, we were talking about doing one [in the community] because they all live so close.”

-Elementary School Parent Liaison

**Contribution:** AZ Health Zone Maricopa staff fostered a trauma-informed learning environment that made food and nutrition meaningful for caregivers. This encouraged caregivers to prioritize their well-being, which opened the door for involvement in PSE initiatives that are also supported by AZ Health Zone Maricopa staff (i.e., school gardens and summer food programs).

**Significance:** This outcome highlights how community-responsive delivery of the ATT curriculum had ripple effects. Caregivers returned for multiple ATT series, eager to break away from their normal routine and learn new ways to support themselves and their children's wellness. In doing so, they connected to PSE initiatives that support families in the broader school community.

“When I work, sometimes I get busy and would end up neglecting myself and forgetting to eat. I wouldn't take a break. But these classes have taught me how important it is to take time for myself, even if it's just to sit down and eat. Now, I make sure to prepare my lunch at home and I take the time to sit and eat. I realized that before, I was always feeling anxious, stressed, and I was in a bad mood all the time. But really, I was just hungry and not taking care of myself.”

-Parent Participant



# AZ HEALTH ZONE

This report was prepared by the AZ Health Zone State Evaluation Team, operating out of the University of Arizona School of Nutritional Sciences & Wellness. Select quotes were de-identified or edited for clarity. Suggested citation: Jacobs L, LeGros T, Bhakta A, Yazzie D. AZ Health Zone FY25 Annual Evaluation Report: Coming Together for SNAP-Ed Changemaking. Available at: <https://nutritioneval.arizona.edu/results>

This project was funded by the AZ Health Zone and approved by the ADHS Human Subjects Review Board. Any interpretations or recommendations included herein are those of the authors and should not be construed as the official position of the ADHS. SNAP-Ed is the education arm of the USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The USDA is an equal opportunity employer.



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES  
**Nutritional Sciences  
& Wellness**

November 2025