



MUSC Boeing Center
for Children's Wellness

2021

Impact Report



Letter from the Director

Dear friends of the MUSC Boeing Center for Children's Wellness,

Never has our School-Based Wellness Initiative been more important than during the past two school years. We are living in a time of such crisis that it is difficult to prioritize health and wellness. Our Initiative, originally community-generated, remains flexible enough to address changing needs; that's one of the things I like about it. We began this work about 20 years ago when childhood obesity was rising, and many children lacked access to healthy food and physical activity opportunities.

Back then, we were called the "Lean Team", and we worked in a few Charleston County schools to evaluate students, teach about nutrition, and promote classroom physical activity. When The Boeing Company began supporting our efforts, we expanded to more schools and districts and shifted from a programmatic model to one that supports schools as they implement policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes. Each year, we make improvements to the Initiative based on our annual outcome evaluation and changing needs of school communities. Most recently, we have focused on encouraging more Staff Wellness and Social-Emotional Learning strategies.



This year, despite the many demands placed upon school staff, we were amazed and gratified by the amount of wellness work they were able to accomplish. We reached 17 districts, 187 schools, and 109,000 students. Eight of these districts were brand new to the Initiative this year. I think this high level of participation is because our dedicated school staff agree with our premise, "a healthy student is a better learner."

What we do works. Students attending schools who participate in our Initiative have healthier weights, improved attendance, better behavior, and are more likely to graduate from high school. We have also found improvement in health outcomes; students with asthma who attend participating schools have fewer emergency visits.

As I've said before, the flexibility of our Initiative is key. Just as we shifted from a focus on obesity to overall wellness, we must now change to meet the tremendous need for improved mental health prevention and treatment. Thanks to a generous collaboration between The Boeing Company and the Charleston County School District, we will build upon the foundation of wellness and bring needed mental health resources and services into schools, always with the goal of helping children succeed in school and thrive in life.

All of this is important because education is the most modifiable factor contributing to health disparity. Whether or not a student graduates from high school impacts their lifelong health, income, and achievement, and can also improve the health, income, and achievement of future children. It's a two-way street; healthy students are better learners, and doing better in school makes people healthier. Supporting schools in laying the groundwork for creating a culture of wellness is particularly important as students work to catch up from academic losses and close widened educational disparities. In partnership with our schools, and with the support of our partners and funders, we continue to work toward our vision, a South Carolina where all children are healthy, succeed in school, and thrive in life.

With gratitude,

Janice D. Key, MD

About Us

Our Mission

The MUSC BCCW engages school communities in creating healthy learning environments through the implementation of targeted wellness initiatives.

Our Vision

Our vision is a South Carolina where all children are healthy, succeed in school, and thrive in life.



What We Do

The MUSC BCCW School-Based Wellness Initiative works to create a culture of wellness by providing direct support and motivation for K-12 schools and districts as they implement evidence-based wellness strategies. The Initiative is designed to engage the school community in creating a healthy learning environment through support from an MUSC BCCW Program Coordinator, an active school wellness committee, and the utilization of the School Wellness Checklist© (SWC).

Program Coordinators provide ongoing support and training to districts and schools by guiding them through the implementation of wellness strategies, collaborating with community partners, and sustainability planning. School wellness committees implement policies and practices that focus on students, staff, and families' health and well-being. They also work with an MUSC BCCW Program Coordinator to build relationships within the community to align wellness efforts.

School wellness committees utilize the SWC©, the implementation tool that provides participating schools with various evidence-based strategies and resources that assist them in making the policy, systems, and environmental changes required to build and sustain a culture of wellness. Schools implementing significant wellness changes throughout the school year receive a monetary Wellness Award to grow and sustain their wellness initiatives the following year.

About Us

School Wellness Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Despite many districts returning to in-person instruction, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to place a great deal of stress on schools. Due to community spread, quarantine requirements, etc., schools often needed to pivot quickly between in-person instruction, distance learning, and hybrid environments. The frequent changes in how instruction was being provided led us to believe that we would see a decrease in participation this school year. Instead, we grew from 11 to 17 school districts, from 158 to 187 schools, and 93% of participating schools earned a Wellness Award!

This school year we found that schools needed wellness more than ever. School staff were seeking resources to help create healthy learning environments and our team was equipped to support them through this.

*"During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools have faced unprecedented challenges and the assistance provided by the MUSC BCCW is more important than ever before,"
says State Superintendent Molly Spearman.*

We continued to meet the needs of schools in ways such as: providing more time at the end of the school year to log points, increasing the number of Social-Emotional Learning strategies on the Checklist©, offering more hands-on assistance to schools, and allowing for more flexibility in the ways that schools can earn points on the Checklist©. We anticipate that in the coming school years, we will continue to adjust based on the needs of our schools. Although the pandemic has presented many challenges, it has also presented opportunities for schools to get creative with virtual wellness activities. We look forward to supporting schools as they implement more activities like this in the future.

Expanding the Initiative

As we shared in our 2019-2020 report, we expanded to eight new school districts this year through both Healthy Me - Healthy SC (HMHSC) and the BlueCross® BlueShield® of South Carolina Foundation Diabetes Free SC (DFSC) initiative. In the upcoming year, we anticipate expansion to an additional three school districts under these same initiatives. A culture of wellness in a school setting is more important than ever, and we look forward to supporting these additional schools in their wellness efforts.

This year, we also welcomed Maclain Borsich and Angela Wicke to our team. Maclain and Angela join the team with diverse experiences and a passion for school wellness. We are excited for them to share their knowledge and experiences with our schools!

To achieve our vision, a South Carolina where all children are healthy, succeed in school, and thrive in life, we must continually adapt to meet the needs of our schools and communities. These needs have changed since we began the Initiative over 10 years ago, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to these changes, we are piloting the utilization of the MUSC BCCW as a hub to bring needed mental health resources into schools. We first piloted this model in Colleton County School District through support from the Stony Point Foundation.

We are overjoyed to share that through a generous collaboration between The Boeing Company and the Charleston County School District (CCSD), we were awarded \$2 million to both support our current Initiative and launch a pilot to address mental health needs in CCSD. With this award, our goals are to (1) support and improve the current Initiative, (2) add mental health services to participating schools, and (3) develop a plan to substantially change and improve the mental health system. We look forward to sharing more on this exciting award throughout the year.



Maclain Borsich



Angela Wicke

By the Numbers

2020-2021 impact across schools state-wide



17

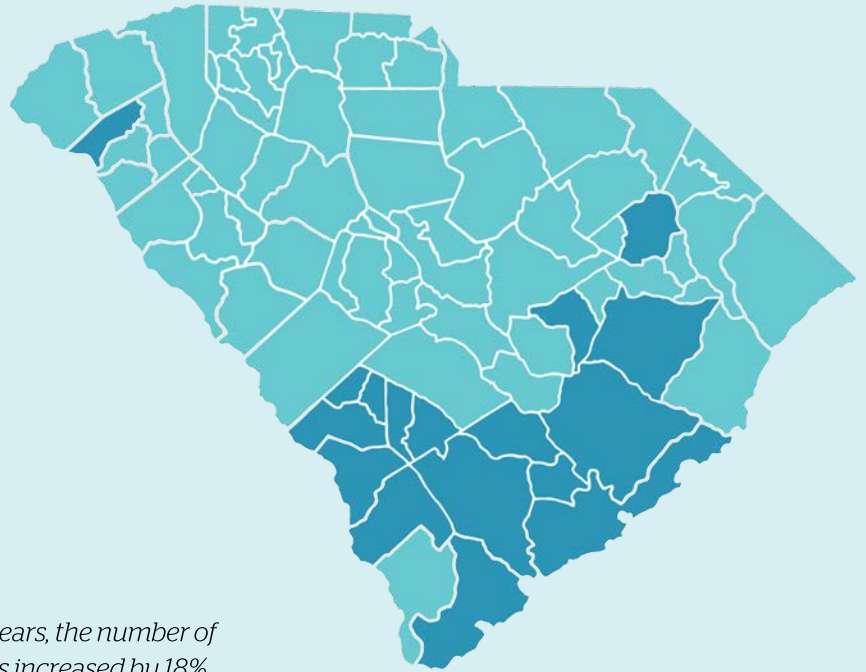
districts

187

schools

109,000

K-12 students



Between the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, the number of districts increased by 54%, the number of schools increased by 18%, and the number of students increased by 2%.



64%

of schools had community partners



\$156K

wellness funds awarded to schools



44

schools served and promoted locally grown produce



68%

of schools had food-based gardens



13%

of schools participated in community physical activity events



72

schools used gardens to teach about nutrition



87

schools had staff wellness programming



134

schools increased classroom physical activity



108

adopting health care professionals

Outcomes

Our impact on health and education



Obesity

Between 2014-2019, the average student BMI significantly decreased in participating schools, while the average BMI of students in non-participating schools significantly increased.

A child who attended a school that earned a higher number of points was at least 12% less likely to be categorized as overweight or obese.



Asthma Urgent Care

There are 12% fewer asthma related urgent care visits or hospitalizations among Charleston County students attending participating schools compared to those who are not.



Graduation Rate

For every 50 points a school earns on the SWC©, there is a 1.5 percentage point increase in high school graduation rate.

A high school that earns 150 points on the SWC© will have 10 additional graduates in a class of 300 compared to a high school that only earns 50 points.



Attendance, Suspensions, and Expulsions

Schools who have participated longer in the Initiative had higher student attendance and lower suspensions/expulsions rates. Every four years of participation is associated with a 0.5% increase in attendance rate and a 0.77% decrease in suspension/expulsion rate.

In a class of 200 students, this is equal to 33 more student days per year, and a decrease in suspensions/expulsions from 2 children to ½ child per year.



School Type

All of the above outcomes were similar regardless of type of school (elementary, middle, or high) or resource level of the school community (Title I or non-Title I). This suggests that the Initiative is successful in creating a culture of wellness for a diverse group of schools.

Deer Park Middle School

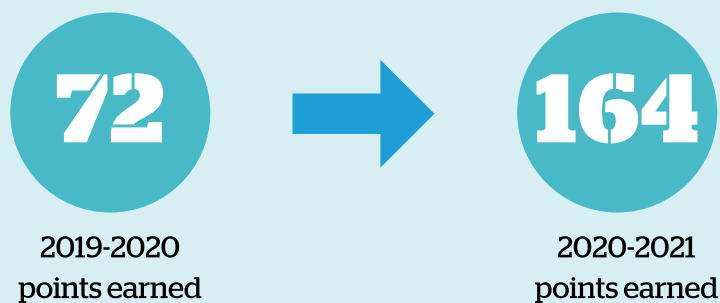
Rising to the occasion

“A culture of wellness is taking care of the whole child,” says Shanitra Deas, Principal of Deer Park Middle School.

Taking care of the whole child is exactly what happens at Deer Park Middle School. When this school year began, School Nurse and Wellness Leader Ann Mixter was challenged by Deer Park Assistant Principal, Ricardo Robinson, to earn more points on this year’s School Wellness Checklist© by implementing more wellness strategies. She took this challenge to heart and really became a champion for wellness at Deer Park.

Ann’s energy was contagious. By becoming a champion for wellness, she engaged more school staff, creating a team that was committed to supporting a culture of wellness at Deer Park. In planning for the school year, they focused on implementing new strategies that would allow them to earn more points, pushing Deer Park to have a 128% increase in points earned in this school year!

This increase in points earned Deer Park the Rising Star Award! The Rising Star is a school in Charleston County School District that has the most growth in the number of Checklist© points earned from one year to the next. The number of points they earned jumped from 72 points in the 2019-2020 school year to 164 points in the 2020-2021 school year!



Deer Park accomplished this by assessing both what they were already doing and also where they could add additional wellness strategies to meet the needs of their students and staff. Principal Deas recognized the impact wellness can have on classroom behavior and academics and assured her staff that wellness was a priority. The support from administration was critical in helping make their participation a success.

Principal Deas also prioritized wellness for her staff. To address some of the burden caused by the pandemic, she began offering additional support through more frequent check-ins and staff meetings. With the support of Ann and the wellness committee, these meetings incorporated games, meditation, and even dance breaks!

“The staff,” Principal Deas says, “are all vested in each other’s success. Working together on wellness was an easy way for us all to stay connected through a shared experience.”

The focus on mental health for staff had such an impact that it inspired Ann to expand Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies for students. In fact, Ann shared that the most meaningful wellness strategy implemented this year were the brain breaks, yoga challenges, and guided meditations in the classroom because it involved everyone from staff to students, even those learning virtually!

Ann is so excited to continue participating in the upcoming school year. She feels ready now more than ever to implement wellness strategies that support the whole child, from expanding gardens to new physical activity opportunities. We can’t wait to see what’s in store for Deer Park!



School staff in wellness committee meeting

Virtual Taste Testings

The importance of community partners and school gardens

To achieve our vision of a South Carolina where all children are healthy, succeed in school, and thrive in life, we must work together with others committed to a similar vision. This synergistic approach allows us to provide more physical activity, nutrition, and social-emotional learning opportunities to more children.

This school year, we established a new partnership with GrowFood Carolina and Trident United Way Healthy People Healthy Carolinas, funded by the Duke Endowment. Through this partnership, we provided produce and educational opportunities to several participating schools to conduct fresh fruit and vegetable taste testings, an important item on our Checklist@! Research shows that taste tests can increase acceptance and intake of new and unfamiliar foods and may positively increase children's healthy eating behaviors over their lifetime.

GrowFood serves as a hub for over 100 local farmers in SC and provides the sales, marketing, logistics, warehousing, and distribution that previously had only been available to large-scale industrial farms. In April, GrowFood provided some of our participating schools with strawberries sourced from three Lowcountry farms to conduct the taste test!

The taste test was facilitated by Anthony Mirisciotta, General Manager of GrowFood. Anthony led schools through a virtual taste test by teaching about how the strawberries were grown, facts about the strawberries, and leading students to use their senses as they tasted them. While the students certainly benefited from this taste test, so did Anthony! He was delighted to see how the students were still excited even virtually.

“It all starts with children and programs like this allow us to share the joys of local food with them. They learn and develop a greater understanding of seasons, flavors, and farming,” says Anthony.

We had initial concerns about launching this partnership during a pandemic. One of these concerns was whether or not we would see interest from schools as they were navigating both in-person and distance learning. We were thrilled to find that we had more schools interested than we could support! We delivered 177 cases of strawberries to 2,177 students in 20 schools. While the pandemic has created many challenges, in this case, it created a unique opportunity for a successful partnership that we are excited to cultivate and grow in the coming years.



Student tasting strawberries during taste test



Local strawberries being delivered to school



177

cases of
strawberries



2,177

participating
students



20

participating
schools

Supporting the MUSC BCCW

Initiatives Made Possible Through Support From:

The Boeing Company
BCBS of South Carolina Foundation
Medical University of South Carolina
Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation
SC Department of Education
Stony Point Foundation



Giving to the Initiative

The MUSC BCCW relies on grants, donations, and sponsorships to carry out its mission of creating healthy learning environments in schools across South Carolina.

To support our Initiative, donations can be mailed to us or made online at:

givenow.musckids.org/donate.

Be sure to select "a fund of my choosing" when making your donation and designate the MUSC BCCW to receive your gift.





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