

Healthy Kids 5-2-1-0 Challenge

BUILDING HEALTHIER TOMORROWS

It can be difficult to convince children and their families to change their eating and activity habits. That is why Healthy Kids New Mexico has developed a fun Challenge with colorful characters, books, games and prizes.

To successfully complete the Challenge, children follow four behaviors every day for 21 consecutive days: eat five or more fruits and vegetables, limit screen time to two hours, be physically active for an hour and drink plenty of water. In nine counties and four tribal communities, elementary-school students participate in the 21-day Challenge each year to see if they can begin to change their habits.

Once the Challenge was initially underway, Healthy Kids New Mexico brought the concepts to life with characters that could serve as role models for children learning how to develop healthy habits.

“An important part of motivation is to provide fun, interactive, engaging materials to children and their families so they learn about healthy lifestyles in an entertaining way and can potentially change their behaviors,” said Patty Morris, the lead for Healthy Kids New Mexico and director of the Obesity, Nutrition and Physical Activity Program at the New Mexico Department of Health.



Enter Hippy Rabbit. A puppeteer created five 90- to 150-second videos featuring Hippy and each aspect of the Challenge. From there, Healthy Kids began developing other multi-cultural characters to represent each of the behaviors they wanted kids to adopt in their lives. Hippy’s cousin Hop became the character who drinks lots of water.

Yazzie Bear represents the goal of eating five or more fruits and vegetables each day. He likes to help his grandfather in their garden and enjoys eating the corn, beans and squash that his family grows.

Carlita Coyote is friends with everyone and is too busy exploring the forest or dancing with her friends to watch TV or play video games. She represents the goal of limiting screen time to two hours or less each day.

Betty Bobcat is the active one. She climbs trees, runs with Yazzie and dances with Carlita. Her character teaches everyone how they can have fun moving at least one hour of the day.

And then there's Dinky, a skeptical raccoon. Dinky needs enticement to try something new. He's reluctant to give up video games and has to be encouraged to try new fruits and vegetables. His character learns about all the healthy behaviors from his friends.



With these five characters, Healthy Kids developed posters for teachers and stickers that they hand out to schools to use as rewards for children participating in the 5.2.1.O Challenge.

"We kept hearing from teachers, parents and kids that they love the characters, so we said, 'Let's give them a life. Let's give them a place to live,'" Morris said.

Healthy Kids brought together a diverse team, including a writer, educator and illustrator, to develop a whole world where these characters live, like Winnie the Pooh's Hundred Acre Wood.

"We're trying to make these characters truly represent the behaviors and hopefully appeal to kids enough that they want to try to make the behavior changes that the character represents," Morris said. "We really wanted to have a New Mexico feel to it too."

The team created the imaginary New Mexico town of El Pueblito, where Dinky, Carlita, Hop, Betty and Yazzie live. Local writer Kay Bird is creating a series of five Dinky books ranging in reading levels from preschool through fourth grade. Each book discusses one of the 5.2.1.O healthy behaviors.



A Toni Truesdale illustration from *Dinky and THE Rainy Day*

In *Dinky and THE Rainy Day*, Dinky doesn't know what to do when his house loses power in a rainstorm, and he can't play his video games. He wanders over to Carlita's house to plug in his games but becomes distracted by Carlita, Hop and Betty dancing. He spends the rest of his time playing active games and forgets to bring his video games home when he leaves.

In all of the Dinky books, Bird uses a rhythmic, repetitive pattern. From *Dinky and THE Rainy Day*: "So he sat. He was sad. He was sick. He was sunk. His games and TV did not work --- and it stunk."

For the youngest students, *Dinky Drink a Drop*, talks about the importance of drinking water in a playful rhyme reminiscent of Dr. Seuss' *Green Eggs and Ham*. "Drink a Drop. Do not stop. Here's a tip. Wet your lip. Take a sip....Can you sip while you skip? Can you hug while you chug? Can you dig while you swig?"

"I think we all carry books with us from childhood, the ones we love the most," Bird said. "I did my Dr. Seuss tribute."



A Toni Truesdale illustration from *Dinky Drink a Drop*

Deborah Frechette, editor and educational consultant for Healthy Kids New Mexico, edits the books with the eye of a former teacher who knows what kids like. She works with illustrator, Toni Truesdale, to match the text with the descriptions of what the characters are doing so emerging readers can understand what is happening by looking at Truesdale's colorful, bright drawings.

Frechette read one of the books to a group of students she tutors to get their reactions. "The kids all laughed," she said. "They had that delightful sense that it was fun. And it brought up their own conversations about how much T.V. they watch and what are the rules in your house about the T.V. or computer."

As a fine-arts painter, Truesdale has a lot of experience creating faces. "I think these characters are appealing because they have a lot of human characteristics. I think kids like that connection," she said. "Ultimately we want to decrease obesity and increase activity among the kids in New Mexico. These characters are serving as models to the young ones."

Healthy Kids released *Dinky and THE Rainy Day* and *Dinky Eats a Rainbow* this past fall. *Dinky Drink a Drop*, *Dinky and the Best Present Ever* and a longer book that encompasses all the health behaviors will be published this spring or summer.

Morris and the Healthy Kids staff will work with libraries, healthcare organizations and nonprofits to make the books widely available.

"My hope is these books will have a readership well beyond New Mexico, but I want to make sure every New Mexico student has access to these books," Morris said.

The next component Healthy Kids created is a board game for teachers to use in classrooms and for families to play together. The board is a map of El Pueblito with each character's house.

To play "Got To Get To Dinky's" children move their game pieces around the board, collecting each of Dinky's friends to bring to Dinky's house for a party. To pick up Yazzie, Carlita, Betty and Hop, players have to land on a space that has a question related to those

characters' goals. If they get the answer right, they have picked up that friend. Questions connect to the healthy behaviors of 5.2.1.O.



“It’s available to kids who can barely read up to 6th grade,” said Bird, who helped develop the game with Frechette. “Kids can move pieces and identify what each number represents. It can be that simple, or they can answer questions that they need to hear repeatedly to know the answer or the teacher may have already taught them. It’s exposure to ideas.”

Frechette played the game with a group of kids to gauge what worked and what needed to be tweaked. As a teacher for 30 years, Frechette said games are a wonderful way to teach children lessons.

“When I can take any information and put it into a game format, I know the reception in the classroom and the learning is powerful,” she said. “The kids are relaxed, and the information sticks because it’s done in a friendly, easy way.”

The Healthy Kids New Mexico team knew they had to appeal to kids while also meeting core educational requirements so teachers could include the books and game in their lessons and still meet state standards.

“You’re applying math, language and science in a more real world way,” Frechette said. “We’re offering the teachers hopefully something they think is useful and aligning it with the state standards. This will be a really good way of keeping the conversation (about healthy behaviors) going and to deepen it and expand it.”

Bird and Frechette wrote the questions in a deliberate way to support a higher level of literacy among students. The game rules require students to read the entire question and answer. “It’s an opportunity to model how you elaborate and expand on what you want to express,” Frechette said.

Healthy Kids will provide the game to classrooms as an incentive to participate in the 5.2.1.O Challenge each year. Anyone who is interested in doing the Challenge can contact Healthy Kids to learn more about it.

Statewide about 20 percent of third-graders in New Mexico have participated in the Challenge so far. Healthy Kids conducted five focus groups in Las Cruces with students who had successfully completed the Challenge to learn how they changed their behaviors.

From those groups, Healthy Kids found out the entire family had to be involved for the child to change behaviors for 21 days.

Children reported that their parents took their T.V. out of their bedroom, their families walked after dinner, and their mom or dad put water on the table instead of a sugary beverage and had more fresh fruits and vegetables available.

“It takes 21 days to change behaviors,” Morris said. “Hopefully by targeting third-graders, we’re trying to shape behaviors rather than reverse bad behaviors.”

Healthy Kids communities started offering the Challenge to students during the 2008-2009 school year. Governor Susana Martinez launched the challenge statewide in 2011. The number of children participating increases every year. In the 2013-14 school year, 4,325 third graders (*5,873 total elementary students*) participated in the 5.2.1.O Challenge, and 562 third graders (*1,065 total elementary students*) successfully completed all 21 days.



5.2.1.O linked to youth soccer leagues in Zuni

Some districts have expanded the Challenge to include other grade levels. Healthy Kids communities have also offered it outside of the school setting – in summer programs, at soccer practices in Zuni Pueblo and at the Boys and Girls Club in Chaves County.

The next steps for Healthy Kids are building sustainability, integrating the Challenge throughout the school day and beyond schools, and expanding to younger children and their families.

“We have 21 lessons that classroom teachers can use that support the Common Core curriculum. Teachers have limited time so we’re trying to build the support and training so they can see how easy it is to implement,” Morris said. “It works when schools support it, but it needs to be incorporated into the school day and school calendar so multiple teachers and food service workers and principals have different roles.”

The goal of all these efforts is to reduce New Mexico’s obesity rates. The rates for third-graders declined slightly from 22.6 percent in 2010 to 18.1 percent in 2014, according to the latest Department of Health statistics.

“We’re one of many organizations that have helped to see this decline in childhood obesity for third-graders, but we’re not seeing that same decline in our incoming kindergarten class,” Morris said. “It shows we need to start focusing on preschool.”

Healthy Kids partnered with the New Mexico Public Education Department to launch a childcare challenge that asks facilities and homes to limit screen time to 30 minutes or less per week and provide 120 minutes of physical activity each day, the amount the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends. The challenge includes a requirement to engage families – a critical component to make sure healthy behaviors continue at home.

Healthy Kids is adapting the 5.2.1.O Challenge for preschoolers and their families, asking them to adhere to one behavior at a time for seven days. For younger children, parents need to lead the effort. Healthy Kids is seeing that the older children can motivate their families.

The 5.2.1.O Challenge dovetails into the local changes Healthy Kids is making in nine counties and four tribal communities so it is easier for people to choose healthy food and be active in their communities.

“We want children and their families to learn about healthy living and active lifestyles in a fun, entertaining way that could prompt them to take advantage of the opportunities created in their communities to increase physical activity and healthy eating,” Morris said.