



### THE NEED: HEALTHIER OPTIONS

Students at Central Middle School in San Carlos, CA were eager to get their school store up and running again after it had been shut down as part of the district's efforts to implement new policies for health and wellness. At the same time, district Wellness Coordinator Mindy Hill had been working with a group of students in the 7th grade Leadership elective to determine what their next project would be. When asked "What would be a healthy habit that you'd like to promote?," students shared their observations that they and their peers were consuming too many unhealthy, sugary drinks and not enough water. In an effort to address the need for healthier food and beverage options on campus, the students decided that they wanted to start a water campaign to educate their peers and increase water consumption as well as bring back the student store, selling plants and healthy recipes instead of unhealthy snacks.

**"You can grow healthy food and drink lots of water, and it can be fun, and trendy!"**  
-Mindy Hill



### THE SOLUTION: WATER CAMPAIGN AND PLANT SALES

In the past, the Leadership elective had focused mainly on issues surrounding creating a positive social climate at school. With a move by teachers and staff to incorporate more project-based learning into all areas of the curriculum, conversations with the students had revealed a desire on their part to lead projects that were more focused on making a social impact. Get Healthy Community Implementation Funding provided an opportunity to combine these many goals: students launched a campaign promoting "spa water" (fresh water with mint, lemon, etc.) at recess, held a water bottle design contest and distributed water bottles with the winning design, and revitalized the student store to hold quarterly sales of herb plants and accompanying recipes. Different sub-groups of the Leadership class were responsible for different aspects of the projects including logistics, marketing, research, and design.



## THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT FOR SUCCESS: STUDENT BUY-IN

Mindy notes that the number one requirement for taking on a project like this is having a great amount of interest on the part of the students, which then translates into their taking ownership and being enthusiastically involved in the project. “We were able to capitalize on other contextual, or school-based, issues that were already happening, such as project-based learning, as well as the popularity of the handcrafted, Etsy-like ‘maker movement,’” shares Mindy. “This really helped ensure the students’ active involvement in the project and countered the challenge of burn-out that can happen over the course of a school year, in addition to inspiring investment on the part of the other students not in the leadership class.”

**“This project represented a small nugget of an idea that has a lot of potential. It’s a viable way to encourage kids to drink water and to think about the food that they’re purchasing ... ‘healthy’ and ‘sustainable’ can be synonymous with ‘fun.’ -Mindy Hill**

## CHALLENGES: LOGISTICS

By far, the biggest challenges of the project were logistical. A project like this—that is not only implemented but also led by students—is very time-intensive and takes a lot of planning and organization just to get things started. In addition to being constrained by the fact that each class period is only 51 minutes, a week-long field trip in the middle of the semester resulted in one batch of seedlings being neglected and dying, thus delaying the student plant sale project. There also had originally been another aspect to the project that involved setting up a booth in downtown San Carlos to educate students and residents on healthy food options, however the school year was over before the group was able to plan and implement it.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Thanks in part to the students’ awareness-building efforts, the school has now installed a new hydration station in the lunch line and new administration (who will be teaching the Leadership class) is invested in continuing to incorporate gardening and health into the project-based curriculum. Additionally, to address some of the logistical challenges, Mindy is thinking of ways to integrate future work in the Leadership class into other relevant courses, such as science, as well as into the afterschool program, allowing the students more time to plan and implement their initiatives. Regardless of how exactly the work moves forward, Mindy is happy with the work they were able to accomplish in one year alone.

