



# CDC Healthy Schools Stories of Achievement

## Healthy Students, Ready to Learn

# OKLAHOMA

Oklahoma's Healthy School approach: Offering professional development for school health teams and creating painted play spaces at schools

In 2020, the Oklahoma State Department of Education, (OSDE) in partnership with the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) and the University of Central Oklahoma, in 2020, developed the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) Institute. A professional development opportunity led by a team of partners focused on integrating health into the school environment using CDC's [WSCC model](#). This move was timely because an October 2020 report released by the State of Childhood Obesity showed that, in Oklahoma, 18.8% of young people aged 10 to 17 have obesity, the eighth highest rate in the nation. To reduce this percentage and get students more physically active, the partnership created Painted Play Spaces, a systematic approach to offering more physical activity opportunities for Oklahoma students of all ages. **The results were impressive: a 66% increase in teachers and school staff playing games and being engaged with students and a 27% increase in the percentage of students who are physically active.**



## Professional Development

Representatives from eight Oklahoma schools took part in the WSCC Institute on June 4, 2021. Each school sent a four-person team consisting of a school administrator, school nurse, school counselor, and physical education teacher. Specific learning tracks covered physical education, school counseling, and school health services. A pre-post evaluation showed an increase in knowledge, and at the end of the day, each team had developed an action plan on how to implement the WSCC model into their school setting—specifically in the areas of Health Education, Physical Education/Physical Activity, Social and Emotional School Climate, and Health Services—for the 2021–2022 school year.

One successful outcome of this activity was that, because administrators were required to participate in these school health teams and attend the training, they gained a greater awareness of the importance of school health and how school health policies can benefit staff and students. As a result of the training, one district hired a guidance counselor to support the social and emotional climate and a second partnered with the Wewoka Indian Health Center to address a school nurse shortage and provide more health services to students. During the school year, these teams will participate in quarterly Community of Practice discussions to track the successes and challenges they are experiencing and to offer technical assistance and resources. One topic will be incorporating Painted Play Spaces into most of Oklahoma's schools.



## Painted Play Spaces

The mission of Painted Play Spaces is to enhance the play environments at schools by using colorful paint and stencils to create recess games—copycat, bulls-eye, rock-paper-scissors, hopscotch, four square—on existing hardscapes to increase physical activity and student engagement. The activity also includes fitness stations that encourage squats, lunges, jumping jacks, sit-ups, and push-ups, as well as “sensory pathways” that encourage movements, such as hop, side jump, and tiptoe.

**During the 2020–2021 school year, four local education agencies (LEAs) and one pilot school implemented Painted Play Spaces on their campuses, reaching a total of 2,469 students.** In addition to the results mentioned earlier, post-intervention observation showed that over 90% of students were involved in physically active play, the variety of games increased by nearly 60%, and clearly marked play space boundaries increased by over 50%.

A [promotional video](#) was developed to encourage other schools to adopt this systematic approach to addressing childhood obesity with social and emotional support and physical activity opportunities. After publicizing this project through the use of video messaging, schools across the state of Oklahoma have contacted OSDE and OSDH about bringing Painted Play Spaces to their school.

Next steps for OSDE are to continue promoting Painted Play Spaces through the videos and the resources developed as part of the project: a [planning toolkit](#), a [playbook of recess games](#), and [demonstration videos](#). OSDE also has developed a tool for schools across the state to borrow available stencils after completing the toolkit.

Painted Play Spaces was also featured in a CDC Healthy Schools social media campaign to celebrate districts, schools, and teachers developing innovative strategies to maintain healthy school environments during the COVID-19 pandemic. Watch the video [here](#).



“They looked a little bored or lost or just kind of standing around. Now they’re looking at the games that we have on there and they’re getting their friends and they’re just automatically going out there and playing.”

– **Mary North**,  
Physical Education Teacher at  
Northern Hills Elementary School



Post-intervention observation showed that **almost all** (over 90%) students were involved in **physically active play**.

The **variety of games** increased by nearly **60%**.

**Clearly marked play space boundaries** increased by over **50%**.