

Health education is more than just teaching students about nutrition, exercise, and general well-being; it is about equipping young people with the skills and knowledge they need to make informed decisions about their health and their lives. In a time where chronic diseases, mental health issues, and preventable conditions are on the rise, empowering students to take control of their health has never been more critical. This grant will enable MCPS to expand their efforts in ways that will have a profound and lasting impact on the students, their families, and our community. With rates of anxiety, depression, and stress on the rise, especially among youth, the enhancement of health education programs through this grant will allow MCPS to incorporate more resources dedicated to mental health awareness. These tools are crucial in fostering a supportive school environment where students feel empowered to seek help and manage stress in healthy ways. For students from underserved communities, access to health education can be a life-changing opportunity. Health disparities—such as access to healthy food, safe spaces for exercise, and proper healthcare—often fall along socio-economic lines. By enriching our health education curriculum, this grant will allow us to bridge some of these gaps by giving students the tools they need to advocate for their health and navigate the healthcare system effectively. Ultimately, the goal of enhancing the health education program is to instill lifelong healthy habits in students. The lessons they learn now about nutrition, emotional wellness, substance use prevention, and self-care will stay with them long after they leave the classroom. By investing in health education today, it ensures that students grow up to be healthy, informed, and active participants in their own well-being. The initiatives that this grant will support are critical to enhancing health education and ensuring that students are better prepared to lead healthy, productive lives. This funding will have a profound impact on supporting the health education efforts that will improve the quality of life for students, families, and communities in Montgomery County. My experience interning for the health education department over the summer has shown me how much this grant is needed. The health education specialist is incredibly hard working; never hesitates to communicate with any health teacher in the county, and always the first person they call when they have an issue. In fact, last spring when I needed an interview for a story I was writing about health education I reached out to more than 25 5th grade teachers, and every single one told me to talk to the health education specialist. During my internship I learned how much time and effort it takes to create and implement a new curriculum. It took me over 10 hours just to review samples of the new 5th grade lessons, so I can imagine all the time and effort it will take to continue on the health department's plan of doing the same for every grade. When most people think of health, they associate it with learning how to keep a balanced diet and making smart decisions. While those are definitely covered, health education is so much more. It's about making kids feel confident and in control of their bodies. It's about giving students the proper tools and strategies to deal with the complex emotions they experience through elementary, middle and high school. It's especially about creating a safe and supportive environment for students. My experience working with the health education department showed me how teachers are often one of the most important figures in a child's life. They come to them with physical, mental and emotional concerns on a daily basis. This grant will allow teachers to be better prepared to support students. This grant will not only help the health education department, but it will impact the entire MOCO community.