

# 2022-2023 Bright Spot Award Nomination Form

The Bright Spot Awards are an effort to recognize examples of meaningful Primary Prevention initiatives taking place across our state. Here are the steps to nominate your initiative:

1. All nominations must be submitted by July 14, 2023. One nomination form must be completed per initiative nominated. Email completed nominations to Matt Coleman (Matthew.Coleman@TN.gov)
2. All nominations received are redacted so that the review committee will not know the exact location and persons involved with the initiative. The review committee is made up of individuals from each region of the state. They will review, score, and discuss each submission. An average of the final scores given by the review committee will be used to determine the award level earned.
3. Award levels include Platinum, Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Honorable Mention.
4. Awardees will be announced in the fall of 2023.
5. Each nomination will be presented with a comprehensive feedback report from the committee, which will include strengths of the initiative and opportunities for improvement.

## **Application:**

County: Knox

Initiative Name: Nutrition Education Activity Training (N.E.A.T.) Program

Primary Prevention Focus Area(s): Childhood overweight and obesity prevention

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## Bright Spot Award Questions

**Why is this initiative important to your community?** (150 words max; 10 points available)

Childhood obesity is a serious public health concern. In Tennessee, the rate of students in grades 9-12 with overweight or obesity was 39.2% in 2019, higher than the national average of 31.6%. Obesity has been linked to increased risk for poor health and certain chronic disease such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, breathing problems, and joint problems. There is a need for comprehensive prevention interventions to promote a healthy weight for students in our community. The Nutrition Education Activity Training (N.E.A.T.) Program is a childhood health promotion program within the Knox County Health Department (KCHD) that partners with afterschool organizations to teach and promote healthy behaviors to elementary school students in Knox County. The program aims to prevent childhood overweight and obesity to promote health for all students and address the burden of preventable chronic disease in Knox County.

**Is this initiative contributing to a policy, systems, and/or environmental change<sup>1</sup> in the community?** (300 words max; 75 points available)

The N.E.A.T. program hinges on a combination of policy, systems and environmental (PSE) change to promote healthy behaviors and prevent childhood obesity in the afterschool setting. The N.E.A.T. Program encourages policy change with its partnering afterschool programs through a tiered recognition program. Afterschool sites are incentivized to implement policy changes that create a healthier environment, such as policies for staff role modeling of healthy behaviors and healthy snack policies. The N.E.A.T. Program implements several environmental enhancements at afterschool programs each year that are identified by afterschool staff based on student needs. Examples include upgrading water fountains, purchasing basketball hoops to increase physical activity opportunities, and installing an onsite garden for staff wellness use. All built environment projects aim to promote healthy eating, water promotion or physical activity.

Through a successful partnership with the University of Tennessee and afterschool partners, N.E.A.T. Lessons have been incorporated into the regular programming at partner afterschool sites. Each semester, the N.E.A.T. Program recruits, trains, and matches roughly 30 college student volunteers, called N.E.A.T. Educators, with afterschool programs to teach weekly N.E.A.T. Lessons for the semester. The use of N.E.A.T. Educators is a sustainable, systems-change that changes the way N.E.A.T. Lessons are implemented and allows the N.E.A.T. Program to increase the reach of the program.

The N.E.A.T. Program operates N.E.A.T. Harvest which is a partnership with Second Harvest Food Bank of East Tennessee that aims to help students and their families eat and enjoy more fruits and vegetables through increased access and education. The partnership provides monthly boxes of fresh produce along with education to students and their families at select afterschool programs at no cost to the families. This program is another systems change that has changed the processes by which families and afterschool programs receive produce.

**What are the SMART objective goals and major purpose(s) of this initiative? (SMART objectives are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time Bound. Example: By May 2023; all soft drink machines in Lauderdale County Schools will be turned off during the school day, per school board policy.)** (300 words max; 10 points available)

The N.E.A.T. Program's goal is to partner with afterschool organizations to teach and promote healthy behaviors to elementary school students in Knox County.

The following are the N.E.A.T. Program's active grant objectives:

1. By June 2025, KCHD will implement a food literacy skills curriculum for students, families, and staff as evidenced by at least 2% knowledge change in pre- and post-measurements annually.
2. By June 2025, KCHD will develop and implement a multi-component wellness program for afterschool staff to include education as well as environmental changes that promote nutrition, physical activity, breastfeeding, and mental health as evidenced by photo documentation, participation records, and evaluation.
3. By June 2025, KCHD will initiate health-promotion policy and systems changes with at least one university; and facilitate a multi-component education intervention that addresses nutrition, physical activity, and healthy weight management with at least 15 college students each semester as evidenced by meeting minutes and participation records.
4. Annually, KCHD will identify and implement at least two environmental enhancements and educational programming to promote physical activity and water consumption in afterschool programs as evidenced by photo documentation and pre- and post- measurements.
5. In SY 2022-2023, N.E.A.T. will partner with Second Harvest Food Bank of East Tennessee and at least six afterschool programs in Knox County to distribute monthly fresh fruit and vegetable boxes to students as evidenced by distribution records.
6. In SY 2022-2023, N.E.A.T. Harvest will facilitate nutrition education with at least 1,000 students, families and afterschool staff to promote healthy behaviors and fruit and vegetable consumption as evidenced by attendance records.
7. In SY 2022-2023, N.E.A.T. will partner with at least five afterschool programs to provide resources, like refrigeration and food preparation equipment, to increase afterschool programs' capacity to serve nutritious foods to students as evidenced by site visits and pre/post measurements.

**What is the annual budget and funding source for this initiative? If no funding is available, how have you implemented or sustained the initiative?** (150 words max; 5 points available)

For the 2022-23 fiscal year, the N.E.A.T. Program's total budget was \$61,820. The primary funding source for the N.E.A.T. Program is the Project Diabetes grant from the Tennessee Department of Health. KCHD was selected as a Category A recipient of Project Diabetes funding for the 2023-2025 grant cycle, receiving \$150,000 annually for three years. KCHD uses Project Diabetes funds to support several programs, including allocating \$46,820 to the N.E.A.T. Program. The N.E.A.T. Program has also successfully sought diverse funding sources and was awarded a local, competitive grant from the Y-12 Federal Credit Union Gives Foundation for an additional \$15,000 in 2022.

**Have community partners helped with the initiative? What are the roles of these partners?** (300 words max; 20 points available)

The role of community partners in the N.E.A.T. Program is invaluable. In the 2022-23 school year, seven afterschool organizations partnered with KCHD to implement N.E.A.T. programming across 38 afterschool programs reaching over 1,500 elementary school students. The afterschool partners included: the City of Knoxville Parks and Recreation, Emerald Youth Foundation, Knox Education Foundation, SHADES of Development, Shora Foundation, Wesley House Community Center, and the YMCA of East Tennessee. Staff at various levels in these afterschool organizations provide continuous feedback to inform, direct, and improve the N.E.A.T. Program.

Additionally, the N.E.A.T. Program collaborates with other community partners, including the University of Tennessee and Second Harvest Food Bank of East Tennessee, to better serve the community.

**Describe your staff's involvement, including the interdisciplinary team approach taken with this initiative? Begin with the planning process; explain staff roles in planning and implementing the initiative. Discuss how you foster creative scheduling so that clinical staff can lend their expertise?** (350 words max; 20 points available)

KCHD has coordinated the N.E.A.T. Program since it started as a pilot program in 2006. A team of KCHD employees including Registered Dietitians and Public Health Educators worked together, with the support of community partners and subject matter experts, in the initial planning phase of the program. Currently, one KCHD Registered Dietitian spearheads the N.E.A.T. Program under the supervision and support of a Program Manager in the Health Promotion and Outreach Division of KCHD. An interdisciplinary team from across several community organizations contributes to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the N.E.A.T. Program. KCHD has a working relationship with the University of Tennessee and has, on many occasions, consulted with professors from the Departments of Nutrition, Kinesiology, and Public Health as well as the College of Nursing to lend their subject-matter expertise to improve the N.E.A.T. Program and has collaborated with students from these programs to support the implementation of N.E.A.T. Programming in the community. Recent examples of collaboration with the University include a joint project with professors from the Department of Nutrition and College of Nursing and a Nutrition graduate student to evaluate students' fresh fruit and vegetable consumption changes before and after participating in N.E.A.T. Lessons. Additionally, community partners are involved in both the planning and implementation of N.E.A.T. Programming, lending their expertise in child development and childcare. KCHD staff hold regular planning meetings with staff at various levels of afterschool organizations to plan for improvements and next steps for the N.E.A.T. Program. Feedback is regularly solicited through surveys and planning meetings.

**In what way is this initiative especially innovative? How is this initiative different from other similar programs? Is there a specific idea tested with this approach? Is this work informed by relevant literature or research studies?** (400 words max; 20 points available)

The N.E.A.T. Program intervenes at several levels of the socioecological model, including the individual, interpersonal, organizational and community levels, making it an especially innovative program. While the N.E.A.T. Program began as an after-school program to promote nutrition and physical activity, it has grown to promote PSE changes in the after-school environment, equip staff and volunteers to integrate health promotion into their work and personal lives, and support families as they pursue healthy eating and physical activity at home. A major innovation was the development of N.E.A.T. Harvest, a partnership with Second Harvest Food Bank of East Tennessee. KCHD identified a need to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables to local students and their families. Through the N.E.A.T. Harvest partnership, Second Harvest distributes an average of 215 produce boxes to 7 after-school programs each month at no cost to families. The N.E.A.T. Program pairs the produce boxes with recipes and educational activities to encourage families to enjoy the fresh fruits and vegetables in the home environment. In Spring 2023, the N.E.A.T. Program piloted another innovative initiative that focused on supporting healthy behaviors not only to students participating in the N.E.A.T. Program, but to the staff and volunteers who help to implement the program. There are several nutrition education curricula available that are similar to the N.E.A.T. Program. However, a strength of the N.E.A.T. Program is that it is much more than an educational initiative. Through the many strategies the N.E.A.T. Program employs, healthy choices are available, accessible, and appealing for students, staff, volunteers, and families.

The N.E.A.T. Program's efforts are informed by the National Afterschool Association's Health Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) Standards 2.0, which are current evidence-based best practices for promoting nutrition and physical activity in out-of-school-time programs. The N.E.A.T. Lesson curriculum is developed from evidence-based guidelines including the HHS and USDA's Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the HHS's Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, and the NIH National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's Go, Slow and Woah stoplight system. The N.E.A.T. Lessons use these evidence-based guidelines to educate students about healthy eating and physical activity. Additionally, research shows the importance of customizing guidelines to fit personal preferences, cultural traditions, and budgetary considerations. The N.E.A.T. Program features a variety of nutritious foods from diverse cuisines and at a variety of price points so that youth from all backgrounds can learn about healthy eating in a culturally responsive and accessible way.

**Is this initiative considering or addressing an inequity in your community? What is that inequity and how are you addressing it? (350 words max; 20 points available)**

Over the last 20 years, the burden of type 2 diabetes has nearly doubled among young people and the highest prevalence is seen among Black or Indigenous American populations. Locally, health disparities exist among adults in Knox County by race, income level and educational achievement. The N.E.A.T. Program aims to prevent childhood obesity through education and PSE change and aims to ultimately reduce the likelihood that students will develop type 2 diabetes later in life.

The N.E.A.T. Program uses an equity lens when planning for large-scale PSE changes, like refrigeration, or interventions, such as N.E.A.T. Harvest. When planning these interventions, the N.E.A.T. Program prioritizes afterschool programs located in census tracts that are disproportionately impacted by preventable chronic diseases like diabetes, cardiovascular disease and hypertension and experience

higher rates of food insecurity and childhood obesity. Additionally, in the planning phase of any intervention, KCHD engages with community members to allow the community itself to identify needs and assess the fit of proposed interventions or PSE changes.

Finally, N.E.A.T. Program activities are designed to be accessible to all students regardless of their home food environment, access to physical activity, physical ability, or cultural food traditions. The N.E.A.T. Program frames health in a way that is accessible to all and highlights a variety of healthy behaviors to allow any student to see themselves positively represented in the N.E.A.T. curriculum.

**How are you evaluating the effectiveness of the initiative? Is the initiative on track to achieve stated goals or has it achieved stated goals? (350 words max; 20 points available)**

The effectiveness of N.E.A.T. Lessons is evaluated using pre- and post-tests to determine students' nutrition knowledge and behavior change. The effectiveness of staff education is evaluated using participant surveys after each N.E.A.T. University training. Finally, the N.E.A.T. Program completes an annual quality improvement project that is submitted to KCHD leadership in an effort to foster a culture of continuous growth.

The N.E.A.T. Program has met or is on track to meet all stated objectives.

1. Pre- and post-data from students participating in N.E.A.T. Lessons show increases in knowledge and health behavior.
2. In spring of 2023, the N.E.A.T. Program supported the installation of a staff garden to be used for staff wellness, highlighting fruit and vegetable promotion, physical activity, and healthy stress management. The multi-component wellness program for afterschool staff is being planned and piloted and is on track to be fully implemented by 2025.
3. The multi-component education intervention for college students was piloted in Spring 2023 with 37 students. The intervention is on track to be fully implemented by 2025.
4. The 2023 environmental enhancements included a water fountain installation and an outdoor basketball hoop installation along with corresponding educational activities regarding hydration and physical activity.
5. From August to May, a total of 2,155 produce boxes (average 215 boxes per month) were distributed to students and their families at eight afterschool programs.
6. In the 2022-23 school year, the N.E.A.T. Program reached 1,127 students, families and staff through additional nutrition education activities beyond the N.E.A.T. Lessons.
7. N.E.A.T. implemented the following PSE changes to increase program's capacity to serve nutritious foods and beverages: a refrigerator, four water fountains (in addition to the one mentioned above), and commercial food prep equipment. The resources immediately benefited 431 students at five afterschool program and, due to their sustainable nature, have the potential to impact students and staff for years to come.

**What limitations or obstacles might be expected if others wished to replicate this initiative? (300 words max; 50 points available)**

One barrier the N.E.A.T. Program has overcome relates to working with community partners with varying capacities to make PSE changes. Afterschool programs vary in ways that impact their ability to implement PSE changes. Afterschool snack procurement is an excellent example. Some partners purchase their own snack food and have more control of their menu. Other programs contract with food companies or school systems to receive their snack foods. While these foods meet federal nutrition guidelines, there is no flexibility to adjust the menu to exceed federal guidelines and follow evidence-based best practices, such as prioritizing whole fruit over juice to meet fruit and vegetable requirements. In these situations, creative solutions are needed to make meaningful changes within a program's ability to change.

Gaining leadership buy in and addressing staff readiness to change is a critical step in this work and can present challenges. The N.E.A.T. Program has found that many afterschool programs are interested in receiving nutrition education programming for their students; however, some of the recommended PSE changes have been less favorable, specifically not using food as a reward and serving nutritious foods at special events or celebrations. One strategy N.E.A.T. has used to address this challenge is to package the programming and PSE changes together. Students can learn about reducing added sugar intake, but if they are only served high sugar foods, they cannot transfer that knowledge into action. Education accompanied with PSE changes has been a successful approach. Making PSE changes can be challenging, so the N.E.A.T. Program provides customizable support as programs begin to implement changes. For example, one site was resistant to not using food as a reward, so the N.E.A.T. Program now provides non-food rewards to be used for student behavior management to replace the sweets, candy and other food that was previous used.

**Is this initiative sustainable without the resources of the local health department being involved?** (250 words max; 20 points available)

Yes, this program is sustainable without the resources of KCHD. The Registered Dietitian who oversees the N.E.A.T. Program has developed detailed lesson plans for every N.E.A.T. Lesson, so the activities can be replicated in the future. The N.E.A.T. lessons are designed to use low-cost, common materials, like index cards, pipe cleaners, and paper plates, that afterschool programs likely have already or could purchase with a limited supply budget, making the lessons feasible to implement without KCHD support.

The N.E.A.T. Program prioritizes PSE changes with all of the partner afterschool programs. Regarding policy change, over 30 afterschool programs in Knox County have now adopted a healthy snack menu, family engagement policies, and staff healthy role modeling policies because of their involvement with the N.E.A.T. Program. These and other health promotion policies would continue without KCHD's involvement because staff have seen the benefits of the policies for their students and the N.E.A.T. Program has already supported the, sometimes challenging, process of changing and adopting the policies.

The environmental enhancements provided by the N.E.A.T. Program can have long-lasting impacts on students. Resources purchased by the N.E.A.T. Program, such as physical activity equipment, kitchen

equipment, water fountains, and gardens, all have a multi-year lifespan. These enhancements ensure that students and community members have access to healthy environments for years to come.

Finally, the N.E.A.T. Program aims to teach healthy behaviors that support health now, in childhood, and that will continue into adolescence and adulthood to support the student throughout their life.