

**NEWS RELEASE**

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***The Healthy Youth Project to Expand to Multiple Dallas Middle and High Schools*  
Program Educates Youth on Healthy Cooking; Helps Combat Childhood Obesity**

COVID-19 has heightened the awareness of food insecurity and nutrition in underserved communities. The *Healthy Youth Project* addresses the importance of nutrition and access to fresh produce for the most vulnerable students in the public food system. “It goes beyond simply providing meals to inner-city high school students with meals; it’s providing the education to lay a strong foundation and understanding for a sustainable healthy future,” said Debra Peek Haynes, who launched *The Healthy Youth Project* in response to the increasing rate of obesity and health disparities among the nation’s children.

A healthier diet has a significant impact on students’ overall mental and physical health. For the past two years, the *Healthy Youth Project* used an interactive curriculum to educate students on healthy cooking, eating and how to develop an organic garden on the school campus. During the 2020-21 school year the program will expand from one campus to several middle and high schools in underserved communities in Dallas.

Haynes, president of Debra’s Healing Kitchen and DHK Wellness Strategies, Inc., a resident of Dallas, Texas, founded *Healthy Youth Project* as a demonstration of her 30 years’ commitment to building better and healthier communities both nationally and internationally. “Since fresh produce is essential for better health we must address why our children lack access to nutritious life giving foods,” she explained. The project is adaptable to in classroom engagement or virtual learning.

According to The State of Childhood Obesity “The national childhood obesity rate is 18.5%. The rate varies among different age groups and rises as children get older: 13.9% of 2- to 5-year-olds, 18.4% of 6- to 11-year-olds and 20.6% of 12- to 19-year-olds have obesity. There also are striking racial and ethnic disparities, 25.8% of Latino children and 22% of Black children have obesity.”

Texas Capital Bank and Toyota Motor North America, on different scales, support this project through their community outreach programs. “This program provides important life skills that lead to healthier lifestyle choices,” explains Alva Mason, senior manager, Toyota Social Innovation.

To learn more about The Healthy Youth Project teaches visit:  
<https://www.debrapeekhaynes.com/healthy-youth.html>.

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