Healthy U is a program of the New Jersey YMCA State Alliance with funding from the Horizon Foundation for New Jersey. Since 2008, Healthy U has reached more than 76,000 children and families at over 550 YMCA preschool, school and afterschool locations throughout New Jersey. The Healthy U program aims to reduce the risk of childhood obesity by empowering children to make healthier choices, improving children’s nutritional options in school-based environments, increasing children’s participation in physical activity and engaging parents. The program incorporates the Coordinated Approach to Childhood Health (CATCH) curriculum, an evidence-based intervention, which has been shown to reduce the risk of obesity in elementary and middle school aged children by 11%. Furthermore, research suggests that regular physical activity and healthy eating can improve children’s academic performance, behavior, attention and memory.

This report summarizes the 2016-2017 evaluation of Healthy U.
The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the implementation and outcomes of the Healthy U program at schools and YMCA preschool and afterschool settings.

The following sections highlight findings of the 2 components from the 2016-2017 Healthy U Evaluation:

(1) Healthy U Program Implementation

(2) Case Study Highlights

1. Healthy U Program Implementation

During the 2016-2017 Healthy U Evaluation, the Healthy U Champions were asked to complete an online monitoring form at 3 data collection time points. The monitoring form included questions about the reach of the Healthy U program in their respective sites (afterschool, preschool, school), including the number of staff and students engaged in the program. Respondents also described their roles and responsibilities in implementing the program.

Healthy U Champions were also asked to indicate the number of sites they manage, number of students participating in the program, number of Master trainers, number of staff trained at the reported Healthy U site(s) and number of staff that attended 10 hours of training or more. The following summary highlights the 2016-2017 monitoring form responses.

**Monitoring Forms Returned**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month Period</th>
<th>Forms Returned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 2016 - October 2016</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2016 - February 2017</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2017 - June 2017</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reach**

- **Afterschool**
  - # of Participating Students: 1,409
  - # of Healthy U Champions: 325
  - # of Master trainers: 64
- **Preschool**
  - # of Participating Students: 503
  - # of Healthy U Champions: 61
  - # of Master trainers: 42
- **School**
  - # of Participating Students: 706
  - # of Healthy U Champions: 70*
  - # of Master trainers: N/A

*the number of schools was provided by the Healthy U Program Staff

**Total participating students**: 36,614
On the monitoring form, the Healthy U Champions were asked to rate (on a scale including "not at all", "a little", "some", "to a great extent", "not applicable") the extent to which they have implemented, trained and evaluated Healthy U within their program sites. Overall, the Healthy U Champions rated that they accomplished their roles and responsibilities "to a great" or "some" extent during the 3 data collection time points of the 2016-2017 Healthy U evaluation. The majority of Healthy U Champions indicated some specific roles fulfilled:

### Roles of Healthy U Champions

#### 2. Case Study Highlights

Six Healthy U program sites were selected in collaboration with the Healthy U Program Director, Healthy U Core Team and other key stakeholders as identified by the Healthy U Program Director. These sites were selected based on their demonstrated success of integrating a culture of health and wellness into their daily operations and seamlessly implementing the Healthy U program. Data were collected by focus groups, interviews and surveys.
The Hamilton Area YMCA
Alexander Elementary School Afterschool Program

- The program serves 62 registered children in grades kindergarten through five.
- The Healthy U Champion is focused on recruiting, training and developing skills and enthusiasm among the staff.
- The afterschool program provided all snacks per the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) standards.
- The afterschool site provides a variety of vigorous physical activity opportunities throughout the day, even during inclement weather.
- The Hamilton Area YMCA’s organizational structure and processes fostered staff accountability and autonomy while delivering the program as intended.

- 86% of students indicated that eating fruits and vegetables every day made them healthier.
- 100% of students indicated that being active helped them be a healthy kid.

The Gateway Family YMCA Five Points Branch
Battle Hill Elementary School Afterschool Program

- The program serves 67 registered children in grades kindergarten through five.
- The Healthy U Champion is focused on staff training to implement the program as intended.
- The afterschool program provided all snacks per the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) standards.
- Children participated in CATCH games and were physically active every day.
- Staff were motivated to educate both students and parents on healthy eating and wanted to support parents in making healthy choices for their kids.

- 100% of students indicated that eating fruits and vegetables every day made them healthier.
- 83% of students indicated that being active helped them be a healthy kid.
The Community YMCA
Beers Elementary School Program

The school serves 252 students in grades five and six.

The school held a Healthy U Kick-Off to promote the program and educate students about healthy eating and active living choices at school and home.

Food-related policies at Beers Elementary School were based on district level rules regarding snacks and lunch provided by parents, the cafeteria and others.

The school has physical activity policies based on state requirements: physical education twice per week and 25 minutes of recess daily.

The staff and executive leadership at the school were committed to the Healthy U program and their enthusiasm contributed to the success of the Healthy U site.

94% of students indicated that eating fruits and vegetables every day made them healthier. 94% of students indicated that being active helped them be a healthy kid.

The Gateway Family YMCA Five Points Branch
Dr. Charles C. Polk Elementary School Program

The school serves 287 students in grades one through four.

Staff were well trained in a variety of health and wellness issues, invested in the Healthy U program and empowered to develop and implement their own health initiatives at the school.

Food-related policies at Dr. Charles C. Polk Elementary School were developed at the school level and approved by the School Wellness Committee.

The school has incorporated physical activity, movement and fitness into the entire school day.

The principal fostered a culture of health at the school that prioritized students’ and staff’s health and wellness.

97% of students indicated that eating fruits and vegetables every day made them healthier. 93% of students indicated that being active helped them be a healthy kid.
YMCA of Burlington and Camden Counties  
Mt. Laurel Preschool Program

The afterschool program serves 80 registered preschool students.  
Site staff received continuing education throughout the year, including training on the CATCH curriculum and on designing activities to deliver the program in a more innovative way.  
The Mt. Laurel YMCA Preschool provided HEPA approved snacks.  
The site encouraged physical activity throughout the day with music and movement incorporated into classroom activities.  
The Healthy U Champion was well-trained and focused on providing a quality program to families.  

Preschool students' eating habits had improved through the introduction and preparation of healthier versions of various foods in the classroom.  
Children wanted to play outside when they were home and were upset if they were picked up early from the preschool during outside play time.

The Gateway Family YMCA  
Five Points Branch Preschool Program

The afterschool program serves 34 registered preschool students.  
Site staff received continuing education throughout the year, including training on the CATCH curriculum and on designing activities to deliver the program in a more innovative way.  
The Gateway Family YMCA Five Points Branch Preschool provided a HEPA approved afternoon snack.  
Preschool children received at least 30 minutes of daily physical activity.  
The Healthy U Champion has created a culture of healthy living by promoting parent workshops, parent round tables and other activities that engage parents around healthy foods.  

Preschool students were using the “go, slow or whoa” food references at home, identifying unhealthy foods while shopping or eating and choosing to eat a wider variety of foods at home.  
Preschool students asked parents and siblings to participate in activities such as yoga with them on the weekends.
Emerging Best Practices

Executive site leaders, Healthy U Champions, staff, parents and children at each of the six case study sites demonstrated leadership, enthusiasm and unique skills in promoting and implementing the Healthy U program. The following examples highlight some of the innovative practices that engaged parents and staff in creating a healthy eating and physically active lifestyle for the children.

Mt. Laurel YMCA Preschool Program

The Lunchbox Challenge is an initiative of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Nemours and the New Jersey Department of Health (NJ DOH) aimed at modeling healthy lunch choices and improving families’ behaviors through incentives. Students receive points for bringing healthy lunches to school and the points lead to small, appropriate rewards.

The Lunchbox Challenge was successful at influencing behaviors of both parents and students. Parents made a conscious effort to pack healthy lunches for their kids so that they could receive the points and get their reward. Parents “loved the lunchbox challenge” and appreciated learning what their children were eating in school and what constitutes a healthy lunch.

Dr. Charles C. Polk Elementary School Program

Polk University, is a program created by the principal and staff of the school that encourages parental engagement and offers workshops. At parent engagement days, parents are invited to the site to learn about the goals of the Healthy U program and participate in interactive nutrition and physical activity workshops such as cooking and eating a healthy meal with families, demonstrations on how to pack healthy lunches and snacks and participation in CATCH games outdoor and indoor classroom physical activity breaks.

Alexander Elementary School Afterschool Program

The Healthy U Champion established a committee focused on recruiting, training and maintaining staff who were involved with the program. The committee included Healthy U site coordinators and staff who were actively engaged in the program. Committee membership was application based and acceptance and participation included a small raise and a new job title. The roles and responsibilities of the committee were to train and develop the selected site staff to take initiative, be accountable and have the autonomy to implement the Healthy U program with fidelity based on their individual site needs. The committee members supported the Healthy U Champions efforts to execute the program by providing program oversight. This group exemplified the association’s focus on recruiting and training of Healthy U program staff.
Healthy U Program Recommendations

A series of recommendations emerged based on the data collected in the 2016-2017 evaluation from the six case study sites about how to support and sustain the Healthy U program at schools, afterschool and preschool sites across the state. The following are a sample of recommendations that were common across sites:

1. Review and update, as appropriate, the existing food-related guidelines around the types of food (e.g., snacks and beverages) the sites offer children.

2. Encourage parents to provide foods for lunch, snack and celebrations that align with the HEPA standards (e.g., water, 100% fruit juice, fruit and vegetables).

3. Consider offering physical activity related programs or events for families to provide parents with resources for overcoming barriers related to physical activity. These may include additional Healthy U events, organized physical activity opportunities, workshops around time management and schedules and a calendar of physical activity events.

4. Provide parents with daily or weekly check-ins about the Healthy U program activities. This may include a weekly checklist about students’ food choices and level of physical activity.

5. Consistently utilize Healthy U materials provided by the New Jersey YMCA State Alliance to ensure standard communications about Healthy U.

6. Increase the branding and promotion of the Healthy U program to parents through various communication outlets. These may include social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), Healthy U newsletters, email blasts and on-boarding documents.

7. Orient parents at the start of the enrollment period to communicate the expectations of the Healthy U program and raise parents’ awareness and knowledge of the program. This may include a kickoff meeting, such as at Back to School night, at the start of the academic year.