



Foundation Gifts Playgrounds to Mississippi Schools



Elementary students returning to six schools across Mississippi this fall will be welcomed by new contemporary inclusive playgrounds provided by generous grants from the **Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation**. Studies show creating environments for children to experience unstructured play supports their physical health and increases their chances of succeeding academically in the classroom. Schools selected to receive playgrounds did not have a playground, or had a playground that was aged and in disrepair.

Each **5,380 square foot playground** has **24 pieces of play equipment** with turf safety surfacing and shading systems. Also provided is teacher education curricula created as a best practice guide for promoting overall fitness and fun through the use of outdoor play environments. The evidence-based curricula is aligned with national physical education standards.

“The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation is proud to provide spacious school playgrounds where students can engage in active play outside of the classroom,” said Eugenia King, the Foundation’s Health and Fitness Coordinator. “The playground structures are designed for physical activities such as climbing, crawling, jumping and running to improve balance, flexibility and cardiovascular health while promoting creativity and building social skills.”

The playgrounds are being installed this summer with ribbon-cutting celebrations planned for the fall.



(Pictured Above: Rendering of the playground to be installed at six Mississippi elementary schools this summer)

Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation

Vision

A Healthy Mississippi

Mission

Provide leadership and targeted grant funding for sustainable initiatives and programs to improve the overall health and well-being of Mississippians

Strategic Focus

- Communities
- Schools

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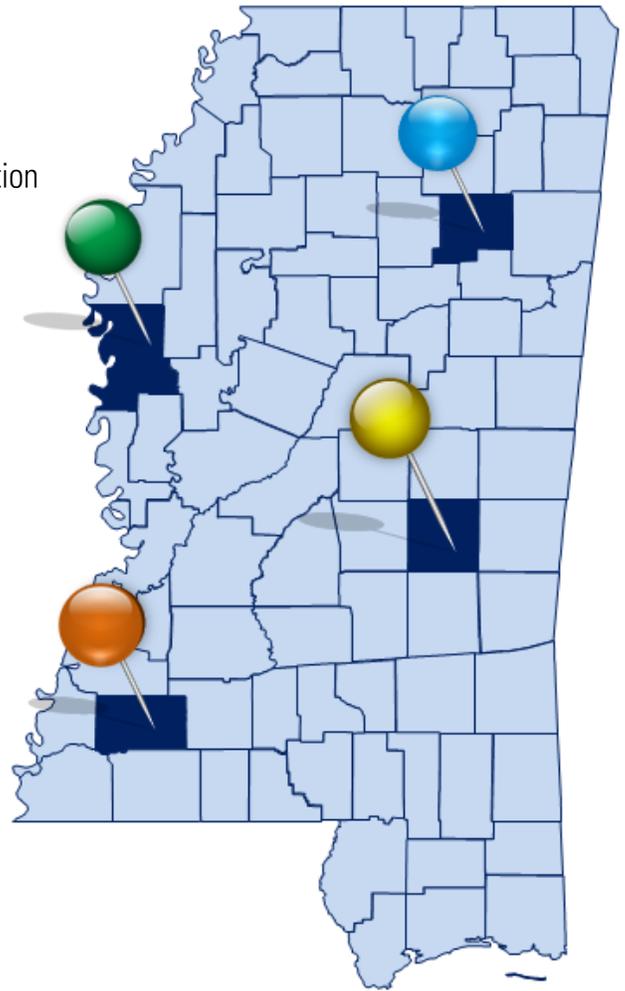
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Building HEALTHY SCHOOLS

Funded by:



MISSISSIPPI Foundation



School Playgrounds Awarded



Chickasaw County School District

- Houlika Attendance Center
- Houston Lower Elementary School
- Houston Upper Elementary School



Greenville Public School District

- Weddington Elementary School



Union Public School District

- Union Elementary School



Franklin County Public School District

- Franklin County Upper Elementary School

(Pictured at Right and Below: Renderings showing different views of the playground awarded to six K-5 schools by the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation)



Culinary Students Learn the Art of Growing Healthy Foods

The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation's School Garden Program continues to provide opportunities for K-12 students to gain hands-on learning and participate in healthy activities associated with growing and harvesting fruits, vegetables and herbs. Chef Catherine Bruce, an instructor at the Clinton High School Career Complex, recently shared her students' gardening experiences with the Foundation.

Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation: Describe the garden at Clinton High School Career Complex.

Chef Catherine Bruce: Thanks to the generous grant from the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation, we have hydroponic towers, railing planters, raised bed planters and cooking equipment for our kitchen.



Pictured Above (Left to Right): Students assemble hydroponic tower gardens; Fresh produce grows in the hydroponic tower gardens; A student works in the railing planter garden. Pictured Below at Right: Teachers and students prepare for the farmers' market. Pictured below at Left: Chef Catherine Bruce teaches students about garden planting. (All photos courtesy of Clinton High School Career Complex.)

Foundation: Is the garden used to increase health literacy about the importance of eating healthy foods, improve the behavior of students and boost the morale of teachers and school personnel? If so, how?

Chef Catherine: Yes! The students continually comment about the joy of gardening. They are taking ownership of the garden and learning about responsibility. The hydroponic tower garden fountains make beautiful music, and teachers come in during their planning periods to enjoy the peaceful sounds and clip herbs and lettuce for their lunches or to take home. Each week, the 50 Culinary Arts students prepare breakfast for school personnel and students incorporating fresh garden produce into the recipes. A favorite is the vegetable frittata. We share recipes and encourage everyone to prepare the healthy dishes at home.



Foundation: How will the garden be sustained going forward?

Chef Catherine: The only expenses moving forward are for seeds and plant food. This summer, we will have a tent at the Clinton Farmers' Market to sell vegetables and herbs from the garden, host healthy cooking demonstrations and offer tasting opportunities. We will use the money we make at the farmers' market to purchase these items.

Foundation: Anything else you would like to share about the garden program?

Chef Catherine: In our Culinary Arts class, we incorporate the garden into our curriculum so the students can learn how the flavors benefit their cooking to make it healthier without sacrificing taste. We also invited the Science, English and Special Education classes to plant seeds, feed and water the garden and participate in healthy cooking demonstrations. Teachers and school personnel are always welcome to clip anything they need for cooking at home. They love this!

For Mississippi K-12 schools interested in grant funding for a school garden, please send an email request to Foundation@bcbsms.com.



Created by the **Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation**, the **Healthy Heroes Program** is designed to increase health literacy among elementary students and support community health and well-being.

“Healthy Heroes” are uniformed police officers and firefighters who visit K-5 schools and lead physical fitness activities, teach healthy nutrition lessons and hold community walks with students, parents, school personnel and neighborhood residents.

The Program’s curricula is aligned with the Mississippi Department of Education to increase health literacy and develop lasting healthy behaviors in school children.

Police officers and firefighters encouraging students to make healthy food choices and exercise while building

positive relationships create ongoing and lasting community benefits.

For police officers’ or firefighters’ willingness to visit K-5 elementary schools with healthy eating and exercise activities as part of the Healthy Heroes Program, city mayors may request Foundation grant funding for items to improve community wellness. Examples of some items are enhancements to a farmers’ market, creation of a community garden, purchase of outdoor fitness equipment or a pickleball court for a city park or buying physical education equipment for a local school.

As of 2022, the Foundation has implemented the Healthy Heroes Program in 28 cities across Mississippi. To learn more about the Healthy Heroes Program, please visit www.healthiermississippi.org.



(Pictured Above: West Point Healthy Heroes Program)

University and College Tobacco-Free Policies Strengthened

The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation is providing ongoing support to Mississippi’s universities and colleges by encouraging strengthened tobacco-free policies to align with the *Model Policy for a Smoke-free College/University* as published by the American Nonsmokers’ Rights Foundation (ANRF). The Foundation is using a tiered approach for awarding grant funds to universities and colleges willing to adopt tobacco-free policies that include 100 percent of the elements of the *Model Policy*.

In May 2022, Copiah-Lincoln Community College (Co-Lin) became the second university or college to fully implement the *Model Policy* (Mississippi Delta Community College in Sunflower County was the first to fully implement the *Model Policy*). Co-Lin completed all three tiers of the initiative, including adopting a strengthened policy (Tier 1), initial implementation of the strengthened policy (Tier 2) and full implementation and enforcement of the strengthened policy (Tier 3).

Co-Lin used the Foundation’s grant award to purchase new fitness equipment for the employee and student fitness center, mile markers for the campus hiking trail, water bottle filling stations and new tobacco-free signage for all entrances to the campus and buildings.

Other Mississippi universities and colleges participating in (or have completed) the Foundation’s grant funding program to strengthened campus tobacco-free policies include:

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| Alcorn State University | Coahoma Community College | Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College |
| Delta State University | Copiah-Lincoln Community College | Northeast Mississippi Community College |
| Mississippi State University | East Mississippi Community College | Northwest Mississippi Community College |
| Mississippi Valley State University | Jones County Junior College | Pearl River Community College |
| The University of Southern Mississippi | Mississippi Delta Community College | Southwest Mississippi Community College |



(Pictured Above: New tobacco-free signage at Copiah-Lincoln Community College)

For additional information about the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation, please visit our website at www.healthiermississippi.org.

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