



Building a Healthy Mississippi

Spring 2021

Community Playground Increases Physical Activity New Play Structure Enhances Walnut Grove’s City Park and Playground



Pictured above and below: Children in Walnut Grove explore the new “Treetops” play structure provided with Foundation grant funds as part of the Healthy Hometown Awards Program.

The **Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation** honored the **Town of Walnut Grove** with a 2020 **Healthy Hometown Award** in recognition of the town’s exemplary efforts in creating a healthy community. The city used the **\$50,000** grant award to install “Treetops,” a contemporary playground for children ages 5-12, in the city park.

“Everyone enjoys something new, and the residents of Walnut Grove are no exception,” said Walnut Grove Mayor Brian Gomillion. “Thanks to the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation Healthy Hometown Award, the new ‘Treetops’ contemporary shaded playground adds value to the town’s green space by encouraging healthy activities among children and their families.”

Mayor Gomillion also said “Treetops” is bringing families to Walnut Grove from neighboring communities to enjoy the play structure and the other healthy activities offered in the park, including a paved walking trail and outdoor fitness equipment.



Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation

Vision

A Healthy Mississippi

Mission

Provide targeted grants to fund programs and initiatives to improve the health and well-being of Mississippians

Strategic Focus

- Communities
- Schools

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Exploring “My Best Me” at Mississippi Children’s Museum - Meridian

The **Mississippi Children’s Museum** opened its first satellite museum in **Meridian** in spring 2021, expanding its geographic reach from Central to East Mississippi. With a generous grant provided by the **Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation**, the Mississippi Children’s Museum - Meridian (MCM - Meridian) is a 25,000-square-foot facility that features the Foundation’s signature “**My Best Me**” gallery. The gallery creates hands-on learning for children to explore healthy eating and exercise concepts with space to host programs designed to increase health literacy among children and their families. In addition to the “My Best Me” gallery, the museum has two other galleries that focus on Literacy and the Arts and



STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math), with Mississippi History woven throughout all three galleries. The museum’s exhibits, programs and outreach opportunities will provide engaging, explorative educational activities for children of all ages.



Pictured left: Mississippi Children’s Museum – Meridian holds a ribbon cutting in late March 2021. (Photo courtesy of Mississippi Children’s Museum.)

Pictured above: The entrance to the “My Best Me” gallery. The gallery is in partnership with the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation.

Indianola Community Wellness Center Construction Underway



Pictured above: McCarty Architect’s rendering of the front of the Indianola Community Wellness Center that will face Moody Avenue.

Construction is underway on the **Indianola Community Wellness Center**, a 15,000 square foot facility that will serve as an extension of the Indianola Family Medical Clinic and as a healthy resource for individuals in Sunflower County and surrounding counties. The **Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation** awarded a multimillion dollar grant to the South Sunflower County Hospital Foundation for the architectural and construction fees. With completion scheduled for late fall 2021, the Indianola Community Wellness Center will include: 1) Fully-equipped fitness center for cardiovascular and strength-building exercise opportunities; 2) Teaching kitchen where healthy nutrition and cooking classes will be taught; 3) Classrooms where participants can learn practical ways to lead healthy lifestyles; and 4) Community room for healthy living activities.

“The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation has a vision for a healthy Mississippi and is proud to partner with the South Sunflower County Hospital Foundation to develop the Indianola Community Wellness Center,” said Sheila Grogan, President. “The state-of-the-art facility will serve as a centerpiece for healthy living and offer exciting opportunities to individuals and families who want to improve their overall well-being.”

West Point “Healthy Heroes” Take Healthy Learning Outdoors



Pictured above and below: West Point “Healthy Heroes” Firefighter Leon Kelley and Officer Virginia Rich lead Oak Hill Academy students in nutrition education, physical fitness activities and a community walk.

Created by the **Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation**, the **Healthy Heroes Program** is designed to increase health literacy among students in grades K-5. Uniformed police officers and firefighters encouraging students to make healthy food choices and exercise while building positive relationships creates ongoing and lasting community benefits.

On a warm sunny spring day in late April 2021, Oak Hill Academy in West Point welcomed the “Healthy Heroes” to an outdoor classroom setting and engaged in the Program’s activities. The Program will continue in West Point’s K-5 public schools once students return from virtual learning to the traditional classroom.

“We are so happy to partner with our city [West Point] and the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation to bring the ‘Healthy Heroes’ to Oak Hill Academy,” said Assistant Principal Katie Ballard. “After a year of not being able to leave the classroom [due to the COVID-19 pandemic], the students had great outdoor fun together at Marshall Park learning about healthy eating and exercise led by the city’s police and fire departments. I believe in taking an all-of-the-above approach when teaching students about the importance of healthy lifestyles, and the Foundation’s Healthy Heroes Program brings creativity to the learning experience.”



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Following the students' participation in the Healthy Heroes Program components - nutrition education, physical fitness activities and community walk - the students moved to Marshall Park's outdoor fitness equipment area. Officer Rich and Firefighter Kelley introduced students to the equipment and showed them how to properly use each individual piece, including a recumbent bike, an agility step platform and a balance disc.

The outdoor fitness equipment at both Marshall Park and Zuber Park was provided by Foundation grant funds as part of the Healthy Heroes Program.



Healthy HEROES!

 **Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation**
A Subsidiary of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi.



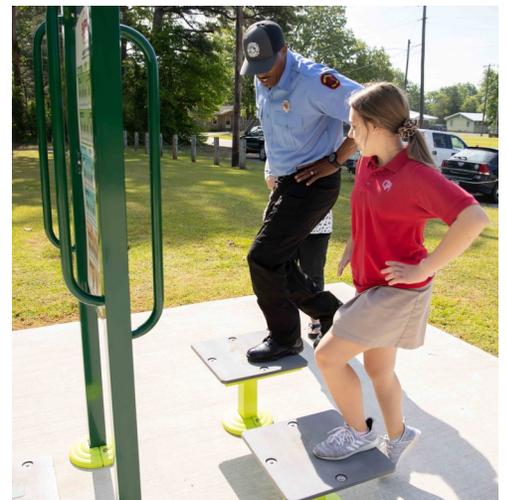
"My favorite part was learning how to use the climbing station. The best part is knowing that it is there, and I can show my family how to use it."

Divi
4th-Grader
Oak Hill Academy



"The stations were harder than I first expected. I got tired but kept working anyway. I want to do it again."

Charlie
4th-Grader
Oak Hill Academy



School Garden Programs Expanded

The Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Foundation’s School Garden Program continues to provide opportunities for outdoor hands-on learning opportunities and healthy activities associated with growing and harvesting fruits, vegetables and herbs. So far in 2021, the Foundation has funded 10 school gardens in nine counties. Since 2015, the Foundation has funded a total of 66 school gardens in 36 counties.

For schools interested in grant funding for an edible school garden, please send an email to Foundation@bcbsms.com.

School Garden Programs Funded in 2021

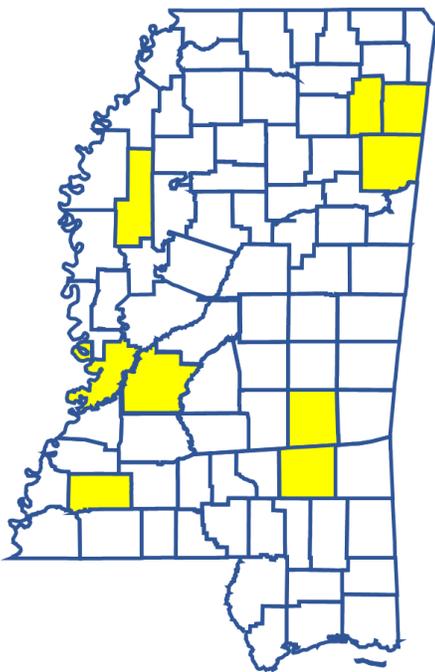
School	City	County
Clinton High School Career Complex	Clinton	Hinds
East Sunflower Elementary School	Indianola	Sunflower
Franklin County Upper Elementary School	Meadville	Franklin
Hatley High School	Hatley	Monroe
Mantachie Elementary School	Mantachie	Itawamba
Moselle Elementary School	Moselle	Jones
Nettleton Intermediate School	Nettleton	Lee
St. Richard Catholic School	Jackson	Hinds
The New William J. Berry Elementary School	Heidelberg	Jasper
Vicksburg High School	Vicksburg	Warren



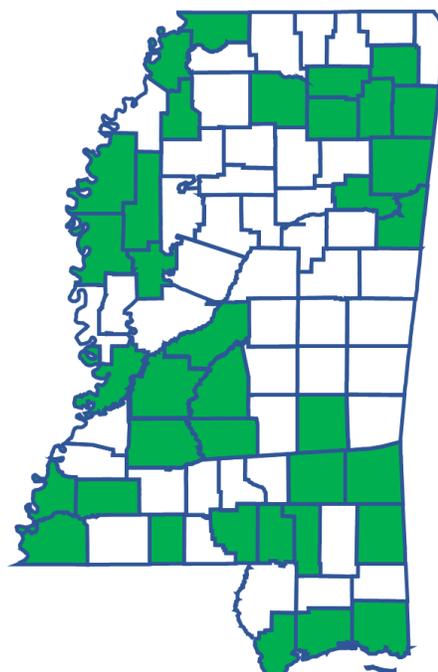
Pictured above: Students at Oak Hill Academy in West Point plant new seeds and document observations of plant growth in their school garden.



Pictured above: Olde Towne Middle School students in Ridgeland work together to design a raised garden bed. (Photo courtesy of Olde Towne Middle School.)



Schools Funded for School Gardens in 2021



Schools Funded for School Gardens 2015—2021

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