



COLORADO
Department of Education

Menstrual Hygiene Accessibility Grant Program

2023 – 2024 Academic Year

Submitted to:

Colorado Senate Education Committee
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By:

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Executive Summary

This report provides information about the Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility Grant Program, created by S.B. 21-255, including descriptions of the challenges addressed by the program, intervention, and outcomes.

Description of the Challenge

As noted in the legislative declaration of S.B. 21-255, period poverty and barriers to menstrual equity affect Colorado students, and some students miss class time or are absent from school because they do not have access to period products. School is an important access point for period products.

Description of the Intervention

During the 2023 - 2024 academic year, the Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility Grant Program provided 35 local educational providers that each enroll 50 percent or more students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch with \$1,000 to \$4,384 to increase access to free menstrual hygiene products in gender-neutral spaces in schools. The Colorado Department of Education administered the grant program.

Program Outcomes

A total of \$99,998.50 was awarded to LEAs, and \$97,322.61 was spent. The total amount of money spent on the acquisition and distribution of menstrual hygiene products in 2023 - 2024 was \$85,410.22, and the total amount of money spent on the installation and maintenance of a dispensing machine or disposal receptacles for menstrual hygiene products was \$11,912.39. Of the \$99,998.50 awarded, \$2,675.89 was unspent and returned to the state.

Over the short- and mid-term, CDE expects that the program will result in increased access to period products and disposal in gender-neutral spaces, along with a reduction in missed class time and absenteeism due to lack of period products. Over the long-term, academic performance may improve, and feelings of belonging and safety for all students, including those who are trans and non-gender conforming may increase.

Conclusion

The Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility Grant Program has been successful in increasing access to menstrual hygiene products in safe spaces throughout participating Colorado schools, with participants reporting minimal program challenges.



Introduction

This report provides information about the Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility Grant Program, created by Colorado Senate Bill 21-255, “Free Menstrual Hygiene Products to Students” signed into law on July 6, 2021. The report includes descriptions of the challenge addressed by the program, intervention, and program outcomes.

Description of the Challenge

The Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility Grant Program was created to address period poverty and other barriers to menstrual equity experienced by students in Colorado.

Period Poverty and Menstrual Equity

Period poverty is “the inadequate access to menstrual hygiene tools and education, including but not limited to sanitary products, washing facilities, and waste management.”ⁱ One key issue is the ability to purchase menstrual hygiene products. In 2023, nationally, 23% of teens reported struggling to afford period products or were not able to purchase them.ⁱⁱ Generally, groups most likely to experience period poverty include students, people who are unsheltered, people of color, and people with lower incomes.^{iii iv}

Menstrual equity refers to equitable access to menstrual hygiene education, products, and disposal. People who are trans and non-gender conforming experience fewer barriers to accessing menstrual products and disposing of waste when period products and disposal receptacles are available in gender-neutral spaces.^v

Period poverty and menstrual equity are associated with missed class time and absenteeism in school. Research from a St. Louis high school indicated that one in four teens have missed class because of lack of access to period products, and more than four out of five teens have either missed class time or know someone who missed class time because they did not have access to period products.^{vi} About one-third of the teens surveyed in a 2021 study missed school at least one day per month due to not having adequate period products^{vii}. In addition, lack of access to menstrual hygiene products is associated with menstrual hygiene management practices that lead to infection, especially among people experiencing homelessness.

School as an Important Access Point

School is an important access point for period products. During the pandemic, students indicated that they believed they would have greater access to period products when they returned to school.^{viii} Since students have returned to school, they report experiencing less stress obtaining products and are noticing more free products available at school.^{ix} Eighty-nine percent of teens agree that public schools should provide free period products, and 49% of teens feel that their school doesn’t care about them if it doesn’t provide these products.^x

Description of the Intervention

The Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility Grant Program was created by S.B. 21-255, “Free Menstrual Hygiene Products to Students,” and signed into law on July 6, 2021. During the 2023 - 2024 academic year, the program provided 35 local educational providers that enroll 50 percent or more students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch with \$1,000 to \$4,384 each to increase access to free menstrual hygiene products in gender-neutral spaces in schools.



Grant Recipients

Per S.B. 21-255, an eligible local education provider is a school district, a charter school authorized by a school district, a charter school authorized by the Charter School Institute (CSI), or a Board of Cooperative Services (BOCES). The Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind and facility schools are also eligible for this grant program. Table 1 shows the number of each type of entity that received the grant.

Table 1: The number and type of entity that received the grant.

| Entity | '22 Number of each type | '23 Number of each type | '24 Number of each type |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| School district | 22 | 22 | 24 |
| Charter School authorized by a district | 8 | 7 | 3 |
| Charter School authorized by the Charter School Institute (CSI) | 7 | 2 | 5 |
| Facility School | 3 | 1 | 3 |

The Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility grant program reached all eight regions of Colorado with the Metro and Pikes Peak regions having the highest number of funding recipients. Table 2 shows the number of funding recipients per region.

Table 2: Number of funding recipients by Colorado region.

| Region | '22 Number of funding recipients | '23 Number of funding recipients | '24 Number of funding recipients |
|---------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Metro | 18 | 9 | 14 |
| Southwest | 3 | 9 | 4 |
| Southeast | 5 | 6 | 3 |
| Pikes Peak | 5 | 3 | 5 |
| Northeast | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| North Central | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Northwest | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| West Central | 2 | 0 | 2 |

Since its inception in 2021, the Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility program has reached a total of 76 unique LEPs. Table 3 shows the numbers of new and previous funding recipients by academic year.

Table 3: Number of new and previously funded recipients by academic year.

| Academic Year | Number of new funding recipients | Number of previously funded recipients |
|---------------|----------------------------------|--|
| 2021 – 2022 | 40 | 0 |
| 2022 – 2023 | 22 | 10 |
| 2023 – 2024 | 14 | 21 |



Grant Administration

Members of the Colorado Department of Education School Health Services Office, Grants Program Administration, and School Finance Division worked together to administer the program and provide support to program participants. The program application period occurred in October 2023, and successful applicants were notified in November 2023. Successful applicants received their awards in February 2024 and had through June 2024 to purchase menstrual hygiene products and purchase and install product dispensing machines and product disposal receptacles and receptacle liners. Program updates were provided as needed, and an optional program survey was administered in July 2024 to gain participant feedback. The School Health Services Office maintained the program webpage and fact sheet and responded to requests for information about the program.

Program Outcomes

S.B. 21-255 requires reporting the total amount of money spent on the acquisition and distribution of menstrual hygiene products and the total amount of money spent on the installation and maintenance of dispensing machines or disposal receptacles for menstrual hygiene products. This information is provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Amount spent by category

| Category | Total amount spent |
|---|---------------------|
| Menstrual hygiene products | \$85,410.22 |
| Installation/maintenance of machines and disposal receptacles | \$11,912.39 |
| | \$ 97,322.61 |

Expected Program Outcomes

Based on the statutory language for the program and the current research literature, the following short- and mid-term program outcomes may be expected: 1) increased number of gender-neutral spaces where students can access free menstrual hygiene products; 2) increased number of gender-neutral spaces where students can dispose of menstrual hygiene products; and 3) decreased amount of missed class time and absenteeism due to lack of access to menstrual hygiene products. Based on the short- and mid-term outcomes, improved academic performance through reduction of missed class time and absenteeism may be a long-term program outcome. In addition, in the long-term, increased access to menstruation management could increase feelings of belonging and safety for all students, including those who are trans and non-gender conforming.

“By having menstrual hygiene products available, menstruators have improved attendance.”



Program Survey Results

In July 2024, an optional survey was administered to program participants. Of 35 program participants, 22 responded. Survey respondents confirmed that the number of gender-neutral spaces where students can dispose of, and access free menstrual hygiene products has increased because of the program.

Most survey respondents (70%) reported no challenges with the grant. The most reported challenges included staff administration, storage of items, and the timing of the grant, which allowed for five months to purchase items.

Survey respondents reported that they are likely to reapply for grant funding when product stock is depleted. Only one survey respondent reported that they would not reapply for funding with the reason given that the facility had adequate equipment and supplies.

One notable trend identified in the survey was youth engagement at the LEP level. Survey respondents offered the following comments on how youth voices have been incorporated in the program:

We have worked with the Student Senate on this program, and it has been great to see them take the lead.

A senior selected this program as part of her Capstone Project. She met with our nurse consultant to identify the products that were ordered from the lens of a student.

Additionally, survey respondents offered the following success stories:

Many of our students are in the at-risk category. Supplying basic hygiene products provides self-confidence and autonomy, and one less stress factor/barrier in the learning environment.

All bathrooms across the full school's campus now have easy self-access to free menstrual products as well as hygienic disposal for used products!

There are no challenges. We appreciate the grant award. It's allowed the district to ensure that menstrual supplies are available in all schools in a way that we were unable to do prior to being awarded the grant.

We truly appreciate having these products for our students.

Conclusion

Menstrual equity and period poverty are challenges for Colorado students that impact their time in class. In the 2023 - 2024 academic year, the Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility Grant Program provided a total of \$99,998.50 to 35 eligible educational providers, of which \$97,322.61 was spent. The program continues to be successful in increasing access to menstrual hygiene products in safe spaces and reducing barriers to learning related to menstruation throughout participating Colorado schools.



Appendix: Logic Model for Menstrual Hygiene Product Accessibility Grant Program

| Description of the problem | Description of the intervention | Short-term and mid-term outcomes | Long-term outcomes |
|--|--|---|---|
| <p>Menstrual equity and period poverty are challenges for Colorado students that impact their time in class. Groups that are more likely to experience period poverty include students, people who are unsheltered, and people of color.</p> | <p>During the 2023 – 2024 academic year, the program provided 35 local educational providers that enroll 50% or more students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch with \$1,000 to \$4,384 each to increase access to free menstrual hygiene products in gender-neutral spaces in schools. The Colorado Department of Education administered the grant program.</p> | <p>1) Increased number of gender-neutral spaces where students can access free menstrual hygiene products.</p> <p>2) Increased number of gender-neutral spaces where students can dispose of menstrual hygiene products; and</p> <p>3) Decreased amount of missed class time and absenteeism due to lack of access to menstrual hygiene products.</p> | <p>Improved academic performance through reduction of missed class time and absenteeism.</p> <p>Increased feelings of belonging and safety for all students</p> |

Endnotes

ⁱ Alvarez, A. (2019). Period Poverty. American Medical Women’s Association. <https://www.amwa-doc.org/period-poverty/>

ⁱⁱ State of the Period: The widespread impact of period poverty on US students. (2023). <https://period.org/uploads/SOTP-2023.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ State of the Period: The widespread impact of period poverty on US students. (2021). <https://period.org/uploads/State-of-the-Period-2021.pdf>

^{iv} Alvarez, A. (2019). Period Poverty. American Medical Women’s Association. <https://www.amwa-doc.org/period-poverty/>

^v Lane, B. et al. (2022) Improving menstrual equity in the USA: Perspectives from trans and non-binary people assigned female at birth and health care providers. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 24(10), 1408- 1422, doi: 10.1080/13691058.2021.1957151

^{vi} Kuhlmann, A.S, Teni, M.T., Key, R., and Billingsley, C. (2022). Period product insecurity, school absenteeism, and use of school resources to obtain period products among high school students in St. Louis, Missouri. *The Journal of School Nursing*. doi:10.1177/10598405211069601



vii State of the Period: The widespread impact of period poverty on US students. (2021).
<https://period.org/uploads/State-of-the-Period-2021.pdf>

viii Ibid

ix State of the Period: The widespread impact of period poverty on US students. (2023).
<https://period.org/uploads/SOTP-2023.pdf>

x Ibid