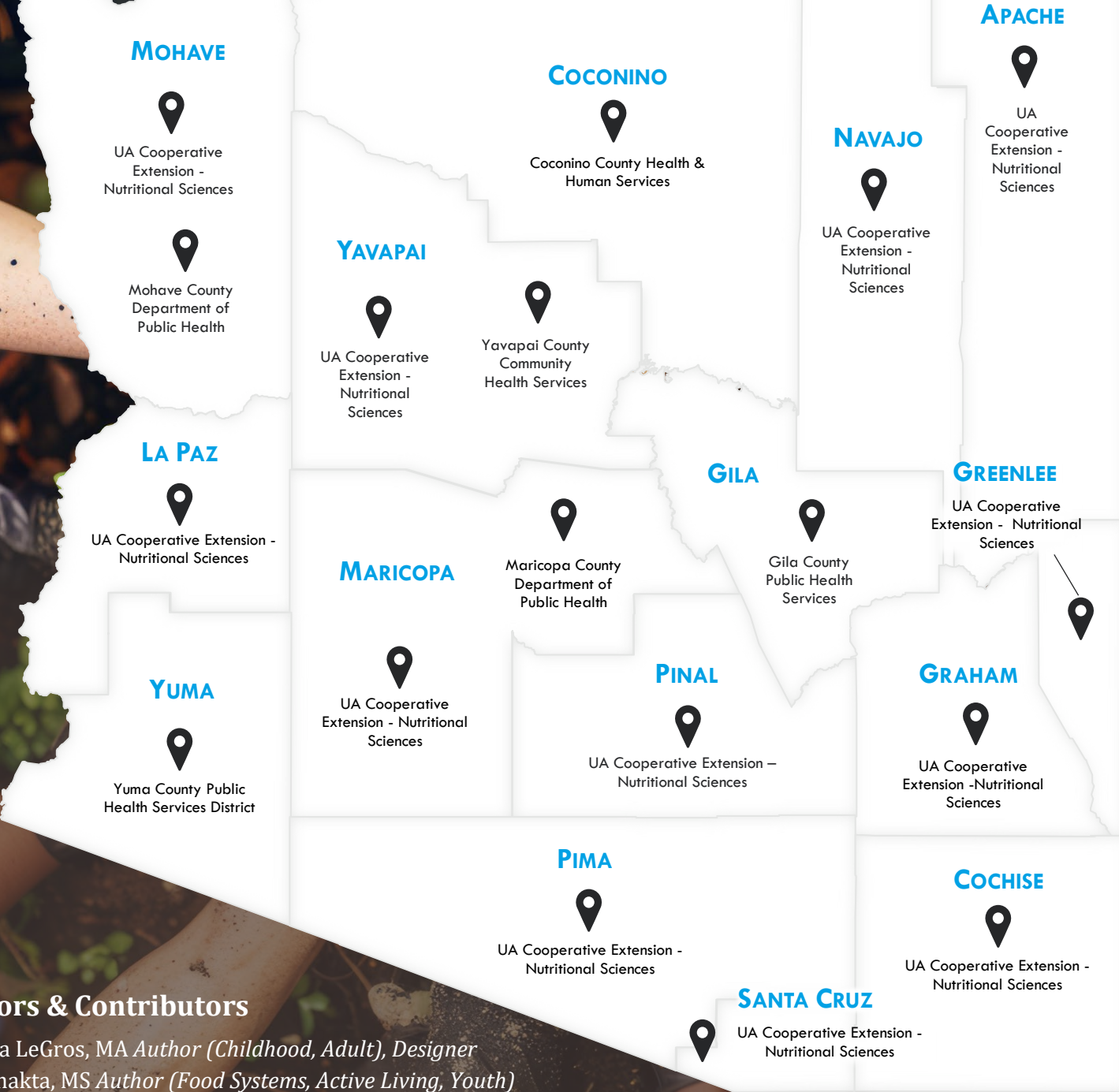# FY24 Evaluation Report

Coming Together for SNAP-Ed Changemaking

AZ HEALTH ZONE

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES
Nutritional Sciences & Wellness

AZ HEALTH ZONE

LOCAL IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES

MOHAVE

UA Cooperative Extension - Nutritional Sciences

Mohave County Department of Public Health

COCONINO

Coconino County Health & Human Services

APACHE

UA Cooperative Extension - Nutritional Sciences

NAVAJO

UA Cooperative Extension - Nutritional Sciences

YAVAPAI

UA Cooperative Extension - Nutritional Sciences

Yavapai County Community Health Services

LA PAZ

UA Cooperative Extension - Nutritional Sciences

GILA

Gila County Public Health Services

GREENLEE

UA Cooperative Extension - Nutritional Sciences

MARICOPA

Maricopa County Department of Public Health

UA Cooperative Extension - Nutritional Sciences

PINAL

UA Cooperative Extension – Nutritional Sciences

GRAHAM

UA Cooperative Extension -Nutritional Sciences

YUMA

Yuma County Public Health Services District

PIMA

UA Cooperative Extension - Nutritional Sciences

COCHISE

UA Cooperative Extension - Nutritional Sciences

SANTA CRUZ

UA Cooperative Extension - Nutritional Sciences

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"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

-African Proverb

Table of Contents

Common Acronyms

ADHS	Arizona Department of Health Services
ATT	*Around the Table* Curriculum
BE	Built Environment
CCHC	Child Care Health Consultants
CCHHS	Coconino County Health & Human Services
CPC	Child Parent Centers
DE	Direct Education
ECE	Early Care & Education
FACTGO	Food Systems and Active Living Goals Tool
FY	Fiscal Year (October 1st-September 30th)
HFPAT	Healthy Food Pantry Assessment Tool
KAN-Q	Kids' Activity & Nutrition Questionnaire
LIA	Local Implementing Agency
NPP	Nutrition Pantry Program
PA	Physical Activity
PARA	Physical Activity Resource Assessment
PSE	Policy, Systems, & Environmental
SARN	Semi-Annual Report Narrative
SEEDS	SNAP-Ed Electronic Data System
SET	AZ Health Zone State Evaluation Team
SIT	AZ Health Zone State Implementation Team
SLM	Smarter Lunchrooms Movement
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
SNAP-Ed	SNAP-Education Program

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

In FY24, the AZ Health Zone (Arizona SNAP-Ed) program evaluation explored Local Implementing Agencies' (LIAs) progress and outcomes in year four of a five-year program cycle. Arizona's seven LIAs advanced their policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) work to strengthen Food Systems, Active Living, and Childhood Systems with partner sites and community wide. LIAs also deepened their efforts in health equity, community engagement (CE), and trauma-informed approaches (TIA).

COMMUNITY FOCUS

FOOD SYSTEMS

All seven LIAs reported 1,239 actions, with a focus on *Gardens* (594) and *Food Access* (325). Five LIAs in six counties assessed 10 food banks and pantries to identify strengths and needs. Overall scores were highest for Storage & Food Safety (74% of the maximum score) and lowest for Policies (42%). In LIAs' community-engaged work, CONSULTING was the most described resident engagement level, found in 31 of the 40 food systems narratives.

POLICY

Two LIAs assessed their policy work in Food Systems *and* Active Living. Their advocacy capacity across seven indicators was highest for Identifying the Audience for Advocacy Work (4.7/5) and lowest for Explaining Advocacy Techniques (3.0/5) and Level of Comfort Speaking to the Media (3.0/5).

ACTIVE LIVING

Four LIAs reported Built Environment activities, with *Community Engagement* the most reported (59% of the 63 actions). Seven LIAs supported Physical Activity Resources. Here, the *Social Support Network* activity was the most reported (56% of 722 actions), with rich intervention descriptions shared in LIA narratives.

CHILDHOOD FOCUS

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION (ECE) SYSTEMS

Five LIAs in 13 counties reported 449 ECE actions, mostly in *ECE-Based Agriculture* (150) and *Nutrition & Feeding Practices* (117). The number of reported LIA partnerships grew by 26% from FY23. Narratives suggested movement away from low-intensity and toward maturing relationships, however LIAs also described difficulty starting or maintaining partnerships due to broader systemic barriers. Successful short, medium, and/or long-term outcomes were reported in 72% of garden partnership narratives.

SCHOOL & OTHER YOUTH-BASED SYSTEMS

All seven LIAs reported 1,642 actions, with a focus on *Nutrition Practices & Environment* (695) and *School-Based Agriculture* (557) and a 5% growth in *Physical Activity Practices & Environment*. Six LIAs used the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement (SLM) Scorecard with 23 schools in seven counties to measure changes in school lunchroom PSEs. From FY22-24, all mean SLM section scores increased significantly, with medium to large effects. Total scores increased the most in schools supported by 1-4 LIA actions, versus those with no reported SLM actions.

INDIVIDUAL FOCUS

YOUTH

This year, 604 students in eight counties completed the Kids' Activity & Nutrition Questionnaire. Most knowledge, attitude, and behavior scores were consistent with *last year's findings*. By geography, students in towns or rural areas reported more health-supporting behaviors compared to city-based students.
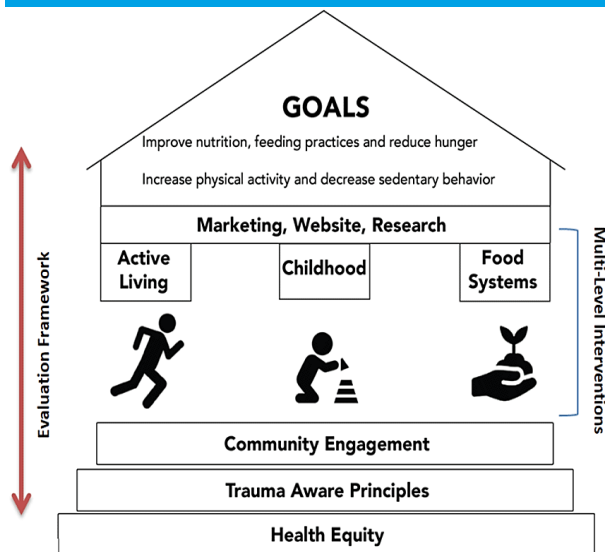
ADULTS

Adults in four counties completed 64 pre-post surveys before and after the *Around the Table* trauma-informed class series. Respondents reported improvements in all five nutrition-related sections measuring short-term outcomes, with small to medium effects. Mean total scores for these sections increased most in FY21 (up 5%) and 24 (up 3.4%).

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) works to enhance the likelihood that SNAP-eligible families choose healthful dietary and physical activity behaviors that reduce related health disparities.

Arizona SNAP-Ed operates as the AZ Health Zone to advance program goals with state partners and Local Implementing Agencies (LIAs) in Arizona's 15 counties. The AZ Health Zone program model below is evidence- and equity-based.

AZ Health Zone Program Model and Principles

GOALS

Improve nutrition, feeding practices and reduce hunger

Increase physical activity and decrease sedentary behavior

Marketing, Website, Research

Active Living | Childhood | Food Systems

Community Engagement

Trauma Aware Principles

Health Equity

Evaluation Framework

Multi-Level Interventions

The AZ Health Zone integrates policy, systems, and environmental initiatives with nutrition education at local and regional levels. This includes community engagement and trauma-informed approaches to support health equity. The program also uses social marketing to reach SNAP-eligible residents where they live, learn, work, shop, and play.

Evaluation of the AZ Health Zone program is conducted externally by the University of Arizona School of Nutritional Sciences and Wellness. The statewide evaluation is guided by LIAs' community action plans. Data analysis cycles aligned to this model may vary each fiscal year.

This report describes results aligned with the USDA's SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework. Applicable outcome indicators from that Framework are noted throughout the report (e.g., [MT1]).

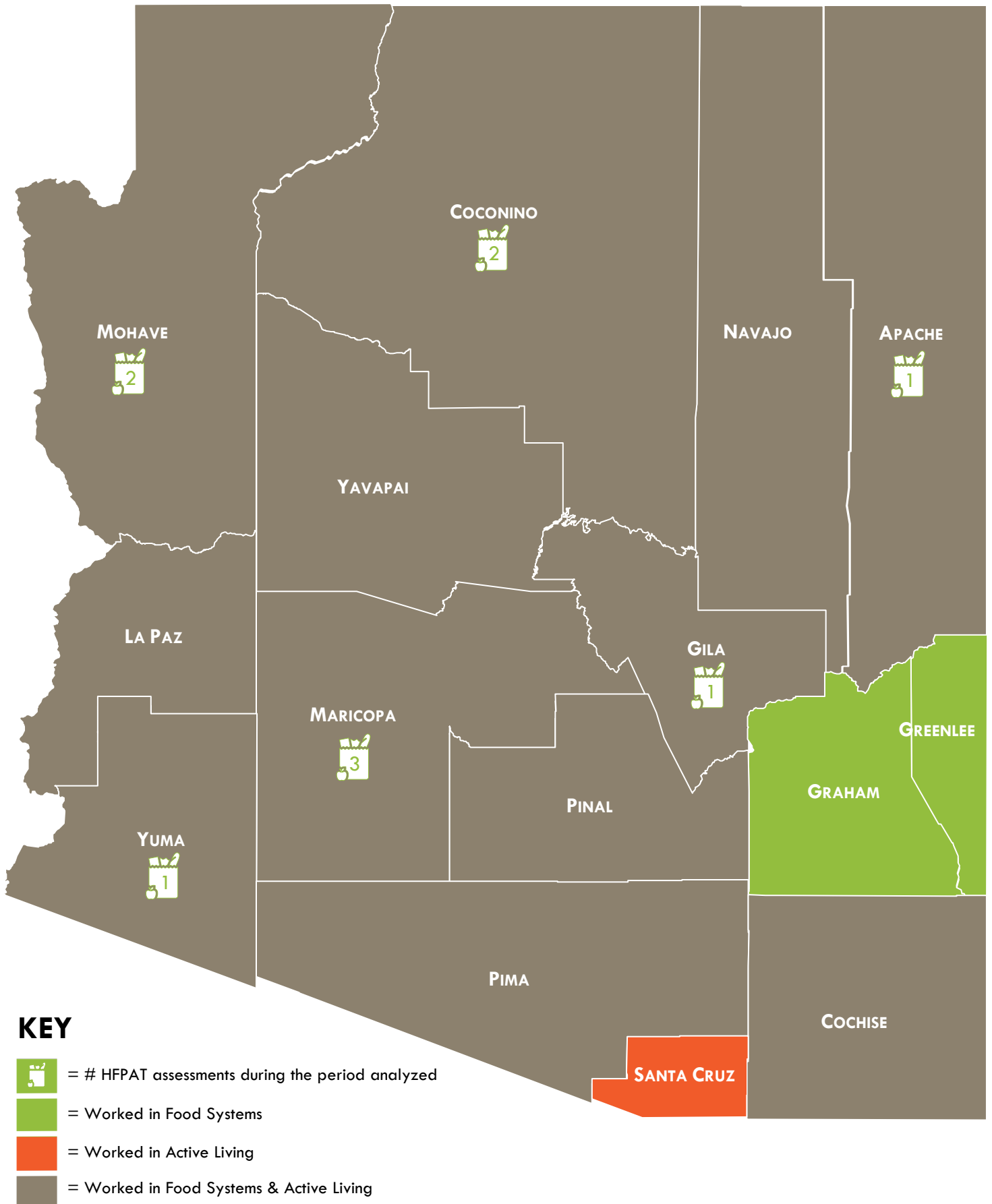The AZ Health Zone State Evaluation Team is guided by **5 Evaluation Standards**:

Utility. Be responsive to priority users' needs and provide meaningful products.

Feasibility. Design practical, realistic, and contextually appropriate evaluations.

Equity. Incorporate equity and trauma-informed principles into evaluation, engaging priority users at multiple levels whenever possible.

Accuracy. Use methods, designs, and analyses that are valid, reliable, and trustworthy.

Consistency. Perform repeated measurements of SNAP-Ed indicators across time.

KEY

 = # HFPAT assessments during the period analyzed

= Worked in Food Systems

= Worked in Active Living

= Worked in Food Systems & Active Living

COCONINO **2**

MOHAVE **2**

NAVAJO

APACHE **1**

YAVAPAI

LA PAZ

GILA **1**

GREENLEE

GRAHAM

MARICOPA **3**

PINAL

YUMA **1**

PIMA

COCHISE

SANTA CRUZ

Community Focus

AZ Health Zone Food Systems & Active Living Strategies

Support the **production, distribution, and availability of food** to increase access to and consumption of healthy foods

Increase **usability of and access to physical activity (PA) resources** and community programming

Support **development of the built environment** to increase access to and use of community infrastructure(s)

Evaluating Food Systems

In FY24, seven AZ Health Zone Local Implementing Agencies (LIAs) worked in Food Systems across 14 counties, reporting their Food Systems actions in the SNAP-Ed Electronic Data System (SEEDS) (**Figure 1**). The State Evaluation Team (SET) assessed *Community Engagement, Farmers/Growers, Food Systems Policy,* and *Food Access* using the Healthy Food Pantry Assessment Tool (HFPAT), Semi-Annual Report Narratives (SARNs), and SEEDS [ST5-8; MT5,7-8; LT5,8-9,12]. We set the confidence level for the HFPAT analysis at 90% (p≤0.10) due to the modest sample size (n=10).
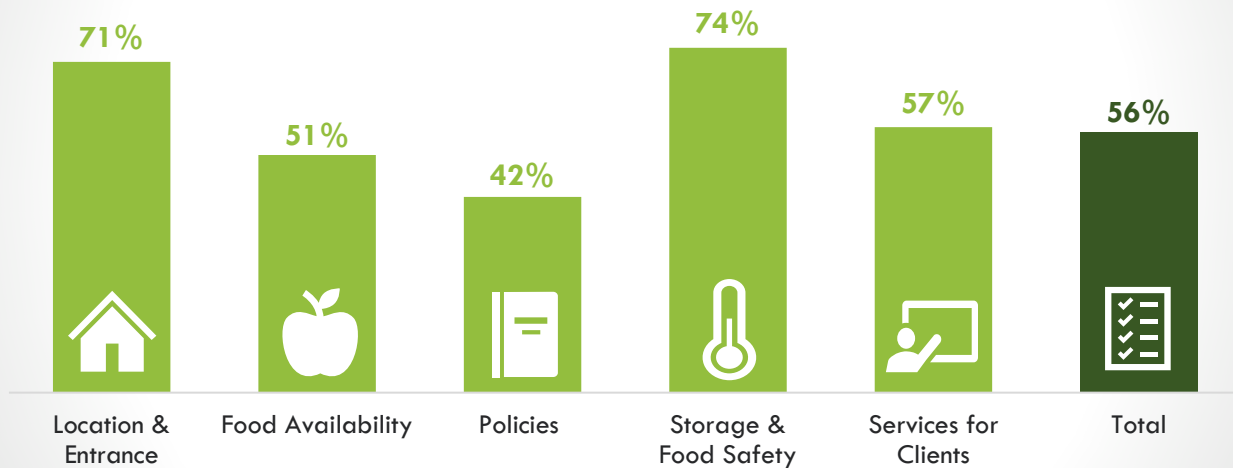
What is the HFPAT? The HFPAT is designed to provide a comprehensive snapshot of a food distribution environment (e.g., food bank or pantry) based on conditions observed on the day of the assessment. The tool consists of five sections: Location & Entrance, Food Availability, Policies, Storage & Food Safety, and Services for Clients. In FY24, LIAs supported 10 food distributors and used the HFPAT for the first time to identify strengths and areas for improvement in the overall healthfulness of the distribution environment. The tool was used with various distributor types including food banks (n=4), food pantries (n=4), and school food pantries (n=2).

A Snapshot of HFPAT Scores. **Figure 2** provides the mean section and total HFPAT scores from the 10 food distributors assessed [ST5]. Storage & Food Safety scored the highest, while Policies scored the lowest. After HFPAT completion, LIAs used these results to guide action planning with their partners.

1. In FY24, LIAs reported 1,239 unduplicated SEEDS actions across the six Food Systems activities.

Gardens 594	Food Access 325
Community Engagement 147	Food Retail 60 / Food Policy 58 / Farmers/Growers 55

2. In FY24, overall food distributor HFPAT scores were highest for Storage & Food Safety and lowest for Policies (n=10). Scores represent the % of the maximum possible score.

Location & Entrance	Food Availability	Policies	Storage & Food Safety	Services for Clients	Total
71%	51%	42%	74%	57%	56%

Coming Together to Make PSE Changes
How did LIAs and Their Partners Use the HFPAT Results?

Select FY24 narratives highlighted how LIAs collaborated with their partners after using the HFPAT. Some LIAs worked to implement PSE changes [ST5, MT5], while others navigated challenges presented from their partners (e.g., site turnover or limited space and capacity for changes). Nonetheless, all LIAs continued to offer PSE-supporting initiatives by distributing materials/recipe cards, hosting food demonstrations, and creating "how-to" video content.

"[We] worked with the food bank director to draft and finalize a food bank policy. It will be added to the food bank's website and posted in the waiting area. **The policy includes language to support the donation of nutritious foods, how they will display nutritious foods, and the types of food the food bank will provide for their clients.**"

-UA Cooperative Extension, Mohave

GROWING THE VOLUNTEER BASE. Two SARNs described LIA support for strengthening the food pantry's capacity by building a volunteer base and recognizing existing volunteers.

"[We] showed the [food bank manager] how small changes such as setting up a swap table could improve client choice. At a food demonstration, food bank clients exchanged items at the swap table, and most expressed their appreciation for having the option available to them. **The food bank manager set up the swap table on two more occasions during this reporting period.**"

-UA Cooperative Extension, Mohave

DEVELOPING POLICIES. Two SARNs highlighted how LIAs helped their distribution partners to develop and implement written nutrition policies [LT5]. Two other narratives indicated policy development as a next step in collaboration with their distribution partner.

"Since taking the HFPAT, **an annual volunteer appreciation and training have been implemented.** This year, the pantry held the appreciation event without [our] assistance, showing the pantry's growth and sustainability for the event."

-Coconino County Health and Human Services

PROMOTING CLIENT CHOICE. One SARN shared how the LIA supported a PSE change based on the client-choice model. This LIA introduced a "swap table," which allowed clients to exchange foods they couldn't use for items left by other clients. This offered greater flexibility and choice in food selection.

How Did HFPAT Scores Change? In FY24, the Maricopa County Department of Public Health completed pre- and post-assessments with one food bank and one school food pantry. **Figure 3** shows that all HFPAT section and total scores improved [MT5]. This trend was also observed when pre-post scores for the bank and pantry were analyzed separately: Section scores either improved or remained the same (results not shown). Across both sites, the most notable improvements were made in developing written policies and additional client-focused services [LT5].

3. From PRE to POST, mean section scores increased for a food bank and school food pantry supported by the Maricopa County Department of Public Health (n=2). Scores represent the % of the maximum possible score.

Food Banks versus Pantries. Food banks collect and supply food to community facilities and programs, whereas pantries are sites that receive food from a food bank. Due to this distinction in distribution models, we compared the mean HFPAT section and total scores between food banks and food pantries. We found notable between-groups differences in three mean section scores (**Figure 4**).

Two sections, Food Availability and Storage & Food Safety, include multiple subsections. For the latter, food banks scored significantly higher in the Food Safety subsection (94% vs 52%, p≤0.05, d=2.0, large effect). Results were mixed for the Food Availability subsection comparison (see *Looking Deeper*, next page).
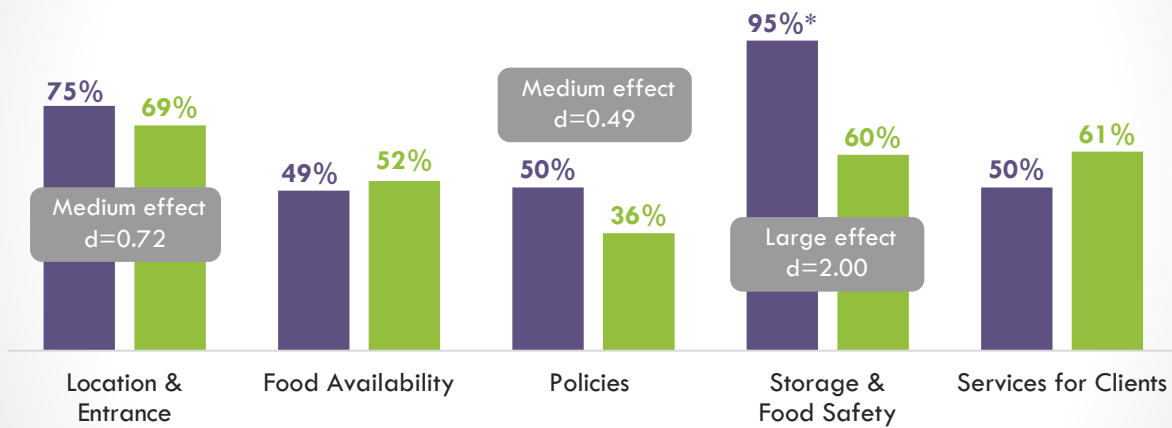
Differences in scores may be due to the unique structural and operational characteristics of food banks versus pantries. Food banks often operate in larger facilities designed for wider-

"**The pantry [is committed] to nutrition** through providing fresh produce, whole grains, and other healthful choices; [connecting] families to resources such as nutrition education, community partners, and healthcare services; and [prioritizing] client-centered services to foster a nurturing and inclusive atmosphere."

-Maricopa County Department of Public Health

scale distribution. Therefore, food banks may be better equipped for storage. They may also have more stringent food safety protocols, accessible entrances, parking, and alternative transportation options for clients to get to the food bank. In addition, food banks may have formalized policies due to their dependency on grants and partnerships for funding and food donations.

4. Mean section scores were generally higher for FOOD BANKS (n=4) than FOOD PANTRIES (n=6). Scores represent the % of the maximum possible score.

			95%*		
75%	69%		Medium effect d=0.49	60%	61%
Medium effect d=0.72	49% 52%	50% 36%	Large effect d=2.00	50%	

Location & Entrance — Food Availability — Policies — Storage & Food Safety — Services for Clients

*p≤0.05

Looking Deeper
Food Availability Between Food Banks and Food Pantries

The HFPAT's Food Availability section has five subsections. We found mixed results when comparing subsection scores between **food banks** and **food pantries**. Two subsections—*Frozen Produce & Fresh/Frozen Lean Protein* and *Low-Fat Dairy, Eggs, & Grains*—had nonsignificant differences with minimal effect sizes between food banks and pantries. Below, scores represent the percent of the maximum possible score.

Note: The HFPAT only reflects food availability on the day of the assessment. As a result, scores do not account for fluctuations in food procurement, often influenced by funding and donations and common across all food distribution settings.

Food Distribution to Clients. Food pantries had a higher subsection mean, with a medium effect (42% vs 25%, nonsignificant, d=0.72). This subsection largely focuses on the type of distribution used (e.g., pre-packed boxes versus client-choice)—illustrating that food pantries may offer more client-choice opportunities than food banks.

Fresh Produce. Food banks had a significantly higher subsection mean, with a large effect (84% vs 67%, p≤0.10, d=1.40). Based on the results above, this could be due to the food banks' capacity to store fresh produce and the development of nutritional policies that focus on fresh fruit and vegetable donations and procurement.

Canned Foods (Fruits, Vegetables, & Lean Protein). Food pantries had a significantly higher subsection mean, with a large effect (69% vs 28%, p≤0.10, d=1.53). Food pantries may rely more on shelf-stable donations, which are easier to store in settings with limited infrastructure.
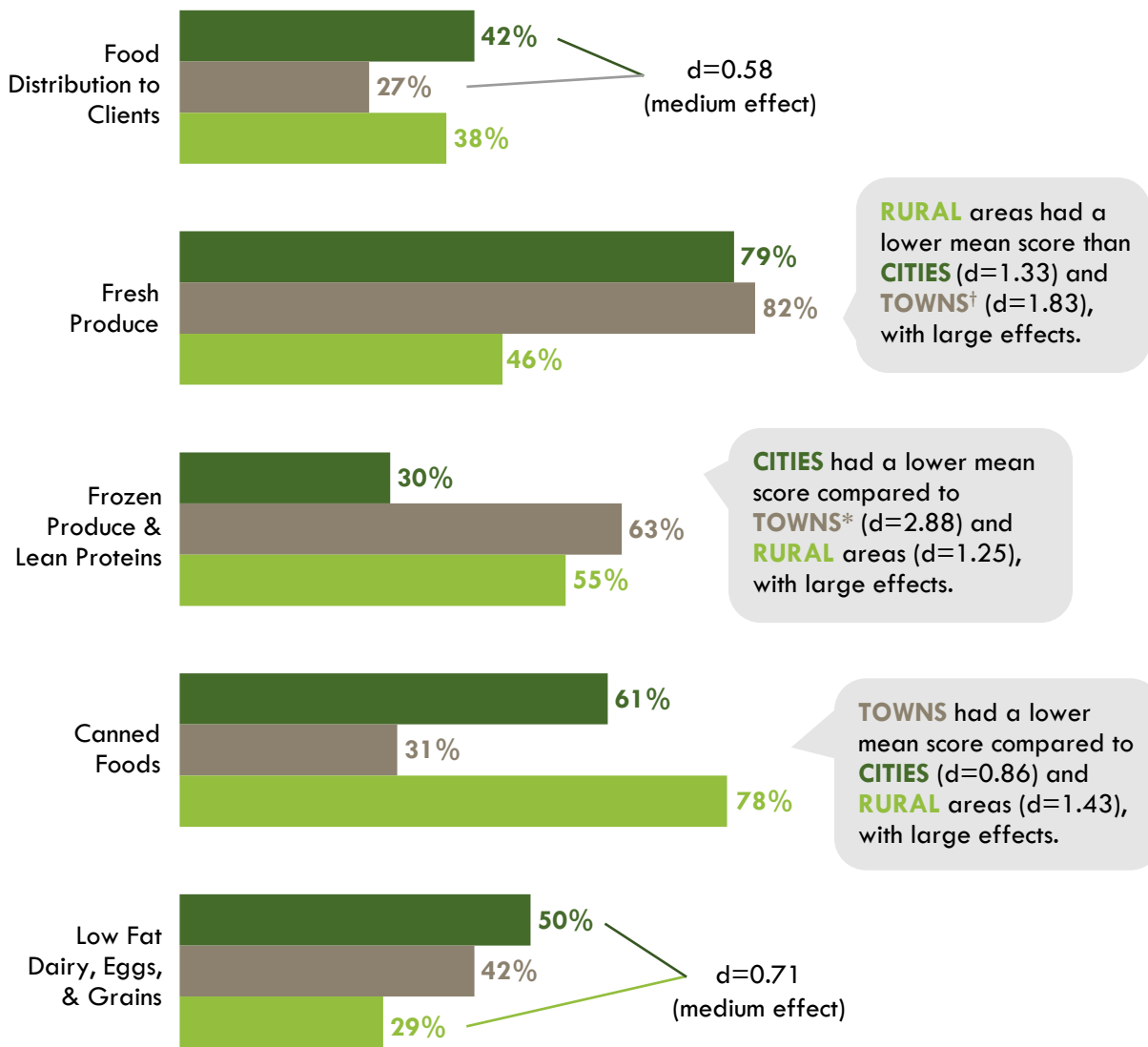
> "The challenge for the [school food pantry] continues to be having an adequate, varied, and steady supply of food to offer. [Setting up] a meeting with AZHZ-Yuma staff, the [local food bank], and the school has been [difficult]."
>
> *-Yuma County Public Health Services Department*

7

Exploring HFPAT Findings by Geography. We also compared HFPAT results across [three groups](): food distributors in cities, towns, and rural areas. The most notable differences were found in each of the Food Availability subsections (**Figure 5**). Distributors in cities and towns had higher availability of fresh items, including produce, low-fat dairy, eggs, and grains. In contrast, rural areas and towns had the highest availability of frozen produce, lean proteins, and canned foods—items that generally have a longer shelf life.

5. Mean scores for the Food Availability subsection varied between food distributors in CITIES (n=4), TOWNS (n=4), and more RURAL (n=2) areas. Scores represent the % of the maximum possible score. When shown, significance is between groups with the highest and lowest % means.

Food Distribution to Clients
- 42%
- 27%
- 38%

d=0.58 (medium effect)

Fresh Produce
- 79%
- 82%
- 46%

RURAL areas had a lower mean score than **CITIES** (d=1.33) and **TOWNS†** (d=1.83), with large effects.

Frozen Produce & Lean Proteins
- 30%
- 63%
- 55%

CITIES had a lower mean score compared to **TOWNS*** (d=2.88) and **RURAL** areas (d=1.25), with large effects.

Canned Foods
- 61%
- 31%
- 78%

TOWNS had a lower mean score compared to **CITIES** (d=0.86) and **RURAL** areas (d=1.43), with large effects.

Low Fat Dairy, Eggs, & Grains
- 50%
- 42%
- 29%

d=0.71 (medium effect)

†p≤0.10, *p≤0.05

While the HFPAT captures food availability at a single point in time, results from this geographical analysis may point to broader patterns related to food access. Distributors in rural areas across Arizona may face challenges in accessing fresh items, leading them to rely more on shelf-stable products, whereas fresh food procurement may be more accessible to distributors in cities.

"[We] met with community members at the [pantry] to talk about the food pantry's environment. One area of concern was the current lack of inventory. [Residents] wanted to see more fresh produce and dairy products. Discussions with the pantry manager led to the discovery that the pantry was receiving funding from [a grant], which allowed for supplemental food purchases [and ended in June 2024]. **Since then, there has been a noticeable lack of food choices at the pantry.**"

-Coconino County Health & Human Services

The Nutrition Pantry Program

The Nutrition Pantry Program (NPP) developed by Leah's Pantry addresses PSE strategies for food distribution using a trauma-informed approach. LIAs helped enroll five food distributors in the NPP prior to completing the HFPAT [ST5]. In future reporting, we plan to quantitatively explore how HFPAT scores differ between NPP participants and non-participants. Meanwhile, four LIAs provided FY24 narratives on the benefits of NPP participation, including guidance for creating client-centered environments, implementing nutrition policies, and setting goals to improve services. Additionally, one narrative noted the advantage of implementing NPP practices to garner greater support from local partners and grant funders.

"Vista Del Camino Food Bank staff completed the first stages of the NPP which included an HFPAT, a client needs survey, and the creation of their work plan. Once Vista Del Camino staff identified their goals, they prioritized focus areas. The food bank is committed to getting a Gold NPP certification, and [staff] have taken ownership of making changes at the pantry to promote a trauma-informed environment. **They recognize the value of the NPP certification, not just for their clients, but also in receiving more support from the City of Scottsdale and other grant funders to fund the food pantry.**"

-UA Cooperative Extension, Maricopa

Community Engagement

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

-Margaret Mead

This year, LIAs reported 147 unduplicated *Community Engagement* actions under Food Systems (see **Figure 1**), half the number reported in FY22 (n=301) and FY23 (n=321). While LIA narratives provided ample examples of using community engagement, the decrease in these actions may be due to improvements in SEEDS reporting. There is also qualitative evidence that community engagement often occurred informally (e.g., casual conversations) during other Food Systems programming, which may not be captured in SEEDS as *Community Engagement*. Similarly, engagement activities might be increasingly integrated into broader PSE initiatives, making them less likely to be reported in SEEDS as distinct actions.

The Spectrum of Public Participation. We looked to the FY24 SARNS for a more complete picture of food systems-related *Community Engagement*. In particular, we sought to better understand the level of community engagement used by LIAs.

Of the 55 community narratives analyzed this year, 43 (78%) described LIAs' community engagement efforts. Three of these (7%) did not provide enough detail to determine the LIA's specific engagement level, while most (40, or 93%) offered sufficient information for us to include in our analysis.

We categorized narrative descriptions under the PRELIMINARY level when LIAs indicated plans for future engagement, and we grouped them under the INFORM level when LIAs discussed one-way information sharing, i.e., "informing" community members about food systems-related programming. While most LIAs

did not explicitly state higher engagement levels, there was enough evidence included in the narratives to make inferences.

In FY24, most narratives described work at the CONSULT level (**Figure 6**). At this level, LIAs asked residents questions around PSE-supporting initiatives (e.g., areas of interest for nutrition education) and explored PSE needs and opportunities with residents (e.g., understanding residents' food environments). Additionally, four narratives pointed to the EMPOWER phase, where LIAs highlighted residents' ownership in community garden sustainability [ST6], convened residents in leadership workshops, and guided residents through community project decision-making processes.
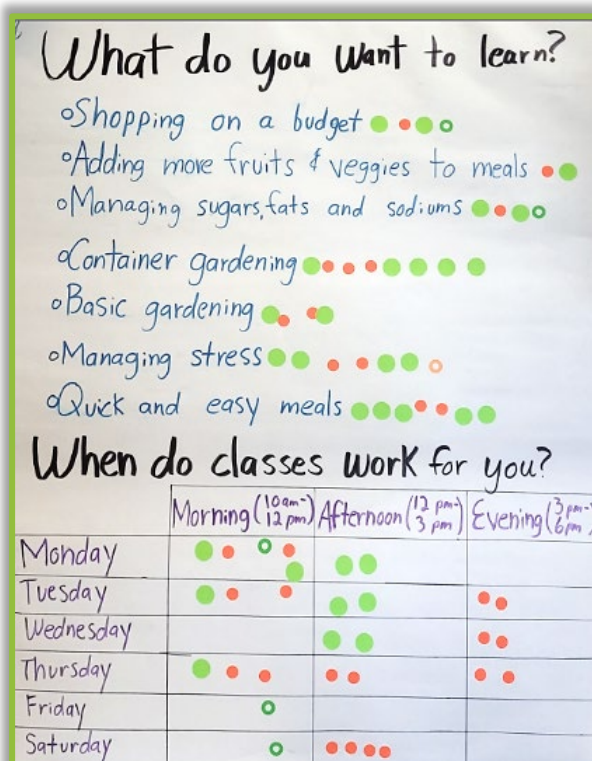
The UA Cooperative Extension, Maricopa asked adults who visited the local library about their learning and scheduling preferences for SNAP-Ed classes during a springtime event.

6. In FY24, CONSULT was the most described community engagement level in the 40 Food Systems narratives that detailed *Community Engagement*. The INVOLVE and COLLABORATE levels were combined due to a lack of distinction in the descriptions. Narratives could address more than one level.

PRELIMINARY (7 Narratives)

"We intend to actively seek community members' interest in participating in the development of the garden. Additionally, scheduled events will provide opportunities for tabling, allowing for consultations with families regarding their thoughts on a community garden and their perspectives on the strengths and needs of food resources/access within their community."

INFORM (3 Narratives)

"[We informed] community members at a recent event about Double Up Food Bucks and the Farmer's Market Nutrition Program."

CONSULT (31 Narratives)

"[We held] a focus group around food access for the community at University Park. A community center near the park expressed interest in hosting a free food distribution or a food pantry in the future, so the focus group was a first step to gauging the need for free food in this community."

"Staff used these opportunities to engage in meaningful discussions about the garden lessons with community members, aiming to gauge interest and gather input about what participants would like to learn."

INVOLVE or COLLABORATE (8 Narratives)

"We recruited three [Summer Food Service Program] Ambassadors and held five meetings with them. They attended various community events at community locations, such as the library, the pool, and Nature Niños to promote summer lunches."

EMPOWER (4 Narratives)

"A competitive bidding process was completed with Salud en Balance leadership and community members as members of the selection committee. [We] provided guidance for the committee to direct them through the selection process. The review of submissions and final selection of the artist was fully completed by the selection committee."

Success Story:
Partnerships & Community Engagement Boost Multilevel Interventions at a Pantry

PARTNERSHIPS. The Coconino County Health & Human Services (CCHHS) first reported partnering with the Flagstaff Family Food Center (FFFC), a local food pantry, in FY20 when the LIA provided nutrition education. This partnership continued to grow in FY23 when LIA staff and the FFFC collaborated on a local beautification grant application to enhance the center's community garden. Since being awarded at the start of FY24, they partnered with other local organizations to bring the project to fruition [ST7-8, LT8-9]. LIA staff also continued to offer nutrition education at the center.

BEFORE

AFTER

"**This project has been a true example of community collaboration.** [We] wrote the grant and coordinated the project, FFFC provided the community garden space, Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy (FALA) students designed and painted the mural, the City of Flagstaff's Beautification in Action grant provided the funding, Coconino County Master Gardeners provided gardening expertise and donated man-hours, compost was provided through a community sustainability program, seeds and plants were donated by local nurseries and farmers, a landscaping company donated irrigation supplies, and community members and *Seed to Supper* participants donated time and energy."

-Coconino County Health & Human Services

Changes to the center included a mural, steel garden beds, trellises, an arch, and a bench [MT5]. To honor the fruits of their labor, a celebration was held for the community. Officials from the City of Flagstaff and Coconino County, the Beautification in Action commissioner, CCHHS and FFFC leadership, Master Gardeners, FALA students and staff, and community members were in attendance to support the garden.
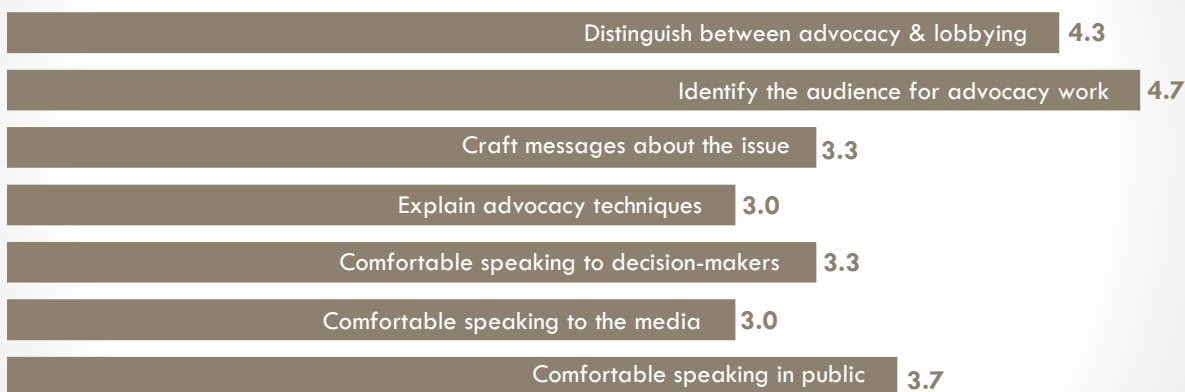

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT. LIA staff surveyed food center clients on their interest in *Seed to Supper* lessons and when they would like to attend classes. The FFFC supported these lessons by advertising them in food boxes and on social media, providing space for the classes, ensuring after-hours staffing, cooking dinner for participants, and offering resources such as multi-cookers. LIA staff then directly involved class participants in the center's garden project.

Advancing Food Systems and Active Living Policy Goals

The FACT GO. This year, two LIAs used the Food Systems and Active Living Goals (FACT GO) tool to measure the progress of three Food Systems and Active Living *Policy* goals at the state, regional, or local level. The FACT GO assesses strategies associated with early (e.g., increasing advocacy capacity) or advanced (e.g., improving media coverage) progress on LIAs' *Policy* goals. Both LIAs reported being in the early stages of a *Policy* goal. Thus, they evaluated their advocacy capacity across seven indicators (**Figure 7**) [ST5]. Both LIAs exhibited confidence in distinguishing advocacy from lobbying and in identifying audiences for advocacy work, skills that may be linked to specific professional development opportunities provided by the State Implementation Team (SIT) throughout the current plan cycle. One LIA scored higher across most competencies, a finding further supported by their narratives that indicated greater experience in advocacy efforts.

7. Two LIAs ranked their team's advocacy capacity on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Scores reflect the mean score of three FACT GO assessments.

Indicator	Score
Distinguish between advocacy & lobbying	4.3
Identify the audience for advocacy work	4.7
Craft messages about the issue	3.3
Explain advocacy techniques	3.0
Comfortable speaking to decision-makers	3.3
Comfortable speaking to the media	3.0
Comfortable speaking in public	3.7

What Advocacy Strategies Did LIAs Use?

Seven LIAs detailed their Food Systems and Active Living advocacy in FY24 SARNs. These narratives highlighted LIAs' diverse advocacy strategies, aligned with the Advocacy Strategy Framework [ST7-8, MT7$_e$, LT12$_a$]:

COALITION BUILDING. Two LIAs supported the initiation or re-vitalization of their respective food policy councils. Three other LIA-supported coalitions advanced their advocacy through public and policymaker education.

POLICYMAKER EDUCATION. Four LIAs attended their local transportation & planning committee and department meetings to voice food and built environment-related input on Safety Action Plans, Master Plans, Land Use Plans, and General Plans.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING. Two LIAs engaged with community resident groups in a series of workshops. The purpose of these workshops was to build residents' capacity to effectively advocate for food and built environment-related changes in their communities.

PUBLIC EDUCATION. One LIA hosted several bike events and walk-to-school days to bring public attention to needed trail connections and road improvements. The events were held in collaboration with a local advisory group.

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION. One LIA supported residents attending a Metro District Transportation workshop. Residents voiced the need for mixed use land development—including food access points and shaded bike routes.

DEMONSTRATION PROJECT. One LIA collaborated with a transportation planning and civil engineering firm to plan a pop-up demonstration. The project was paired with community outreach to understand residents' safety concerns.

Huachuca City
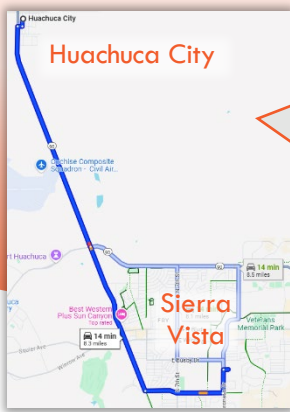
Sierra Vista

"Community members have consistently highlighted the importance of safe and accessible transportation routes between Huachuca City and Sierra Vista. Recent [infrastructure] projects along the highway have paved the way for [the potential of a multipurpose path]. In response, **Healthy Huachuca City has penned letters to the regional transportation network, highlighting the pressing need for safe and efficient active transportation corridors between Huachuca City and Sierra Vista.**"

-UA Cooperative Extension, Cochise

Advocacy Challenges & Successes. LIAs have noted challenges in advancing Food Systems and Active Living *Policy* efforts. These include LIA staff and partner turnover, the time-intensive nature of navigating bureaucratic hurdles, establishing connections and securing buy-in with decision-makers, and having to pause advocacy work due to external factors beyond their control. Due to these challenges, LIAs often pivoted to advance their *Policy* efforts through alternative avenues. Narratives from two LIAs during FY22-24 highlight some of these successes, challenges, and programmatic shifts:

General Plan Involvement. LIA staff from the MARICOPA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH initiated conversations with the City of Avondale to participate in General Plan updates. Despite staff turnover within the City, the LIA continued to offer resources to support their General Plan process, including GIS Farmland data that the LIA was concurrently developing.

FY22

Complete Streets Policies. LIA staff from the COCONINO COUNTY HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES collaborated with a community advocate in the Town of Tusayan to raise public awareness around Complete Streets policies. Through presentations and community engagement, LIA staff worked to generate interest for Complete Streets policies within the community.

Staffing vacancies within both the LIA and the City made General Plan progress difficult. To advance advocacy efforts, LIA staff began to develop a General Plan Advocacy training course for community members. They also collaborated with their local food policy council to create a community guidebook and training on *Best Practices for General Plans*, specifically focused on food systems.

FY23

LIA staff were invited to the Town of Tusayan administration meeting, where they shared ideas aligned with the Complete Streets model. The discussion also included a proposal for expanding the LIA-supported Tusayan Community Garden.

Due to budget constraints, the City of Avondale opted to have internal staff implement the General Plan update, which prevented LIA staff and community member participation in the process. However, initial drafts of the *Best Practices for General Plans* Guidebook and the training were completed.

FY24

LIA staff paused their Complete Streets advocacy efforts due to a lack of interest from the community, business owners, and town officials, along with jurisdictional challenges over town roads. However, LIA staff also participated in discussions around the town's Master Plan, where they spoke about expanding the Tusayan Community Garden. The expansion will include a greenhouse, offering the community the opportunity for year-round gardening and produce. The town is moving forward with the proposal.

Evaluating Active Living

In FY24, all seven of the AZ Health Zone Local Implementing Agencies (LIAs) worked in Active Living across 13 counties, reporting their actions in the SNAP-Ed Electronic Data System (SEEDS) (**Figures 8 & 10**). We used SEEDS and Semi-Annual Report Narratives (SARNs) to explore progress in the Built Environment (BE), *Community Engagement,* Organizational Partnerships, and *Social Support Networks* [ST6-8, MT6-7, LT8-10].

Built Environment

Reporting Patterns. The number of BE SEEDS actions has generally remained consistent from FY22-24. Although these actions have comprised a small percentage of all Active Living actions, the number of LIAs reporting BE has increased over the years: Three LIAs across four counties in FY22, four LIAs across five counties in FY23, and four LIAs across six counties in FY24. This year, *Active Living Policy* had just one reported SEEDS action (**Figure 8**); however, descriptions of policy/advocacy efforts in the FY24 SARNs were not reported as such in SEEDS. This was likely because the LIA (accurately) reported their policy work under other BE activities.

BE efforts, which largely overlap with broader advocacy work (see the previous page), are further explored below. Of note, the BE strategy in this analysis was predominately supported by more urban LIAs. The SET's new walk audit evaluation tool, which will be used by LIAs in FY25, will potentially engage more rural LIAs in BE work.

In FY24, three distinct stages of BE work were evident in LIA narratives (**Figure 9**). SARNs also emphasized the critical roles of organizational partnerships and community engagement in advancing BE efforts.

8. **In FY24, LIAs reported 63 unduplicated SEEDS actions across the five Built Environment activities.** *Active Living Policy (not shown) had one action.*

Community Engagement
37

Walking, Biking, & Transit Networks
15

Active Transport
7

PA Resources Development 3

9. **In FY24, LIA narratives outlined three distinct stages of PSE work that illustrated the progression of Built Environment efforts.**

**JUST GETTING GOING
(6 narratives)**

LIAs engaged with residents to understand BE needs in their communities, and they convened residents to build their leadership capacity for BE decision-making [ST6].

**EXPANDING EFFORTS
(4 narratives)**

LIAs voiced input in their local government, transportation, or planning committee/department. LIAs also convened residents and partners [ST7-8] and hosted events.

**MAKING CHANGES
(3 narratives)**

LIAs supported the implementation of three BE-related initiatives [MT6]: an E-bike program, a walking path addition with ADA-accessible garden beds at a community garden, and a bike lane approval and expansion.

How Did Built Environment Support Operate?
The FY24 narratives highlighted how various stakeholders engaged with each other and with LIAs to advance BE work (see column, right). Collaboration often strengthened BE efforts by combining resources from the LIA and stakeholders. Overall, these collaborations aimed to collect community feedback about the BE, support advocacy efforts, and voice concerns to decision-makers (e.g., local government officials or transportation departments).

Barriers. This year, SARNs identified several challenges to advancing BE efforts, including:

- Connecting to the appropriate decision-makers to advocate for improvements.
- Securing decision-maker buy-in for BE needs.
- Lack of funding for BE improvements.
- Turnover of key stakeholders in collaboratives.
- A dissolution of BE-related partnerships.

Many of the challenges reflected larger systemic barriers, often outside the scope of the AZ Health Zone program to navigate. This may also point to why LIAs with more capacity and resources in urban areas have been more extensively involved in BE work throughout the grant cycle. Indeed, these challenges have also been noted in previous years—which reflects the slow-moving and complex nature of BE work.

Community Engagement. This year, LIAs reported 37 unduplicated actions in *Community Engagement*. Like previous years, this was the most-reported BE activity. Seven narratives referenced an engagement level, five of which described CONSULTING with residents to understand their concerns around community transportation and traffic safety. Two LIAs recruited community members to workshops, designed to build residents' capacity for identifying BE-related issues and getting involved in local BE decision-making processes. Notably, both LIAs emphasized *community capacity building* as a key strategy for ensuring the sustainability of future BE initiatives [ST6].

How Did LIAs & Stakeholders Advance BE Work?
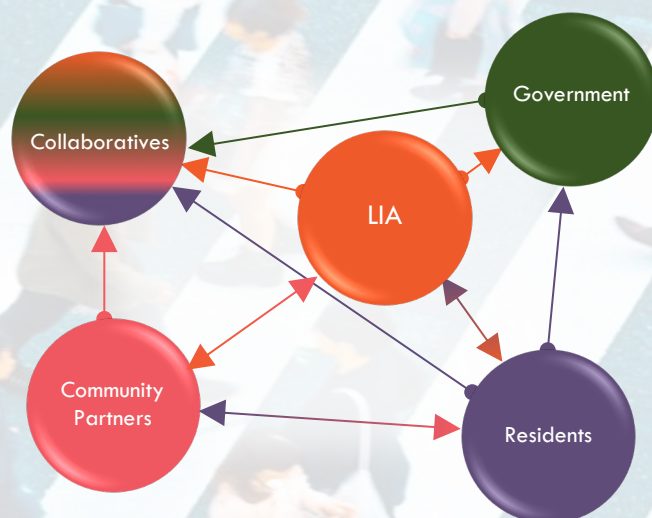
Collaboratives (2 narratives). LIAs participated in collaboratives (including coalitions and advisory groups) comprised of community partners, residents, and government representatives. These coalitions provided input on safe routes for General Plans, worked together on grant proposals to secure funding for cycling routes, and organized events to raise public awareness of needed BE improvements [LT9].

Community Partners (3 narratives). Partnerships between LIAs and a neighborhood association, school districts, elementary schools, a community garden, a transportation/engineering firm, and local assistance programs, helped facilitate a pop-up demonstration plan, installation of a garden walking path, and E-Bike program implementation [ST7-8, MT5].

Community Residents (1 narrative). In partnership with the LIA, residents directly voiced their BE-related needs and concerns to decision-makers [ST6, LT9]. Other narratives concerning residents described LIAs' *Community Engagement* efforts, rather than residents' direct involvement in BE work.

Government Officials or Departments (3 narratives). Two narratives noted that elected officials and representatives from the city or town government departments participated in collaboratives to help champion BE improvements and streamline processes. One narrative noted how city leadership initiated a youth commission, aimed to incorporate youth voice in improving active transportation [ST7].

"[We] invited residents to a community engagement session. During the conversation, we asked, 'Where do you get your food?' A community member started to explain how they stopped walking to a specific store because 'it was too dangerous.' The team came to understand the most dangerous spot on her almost two-mile walk. She described there being a stop sign, but [that] drivers speed through it.

"Additionally, [residents] shared that the heat makes [the walk] a grueling activity, as there are no shade trees or structures. It is [also] hard to rely on the bus due to wait times and untimely routes. Two community members said they have stopped walking to this specific store even if it is the closest one to them.

"We hope to further engage with the community around these topics to **connect built environment work with food access activities.** We also plan to **expand and build capacity in our community leaders to participate in an advisory group** to guide our work."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Maricopa

Physical Activity Resources

Reporting Trends. In FY24, seven LIA across 13 counties reported 722 unduplicated SEEDS actions for Increase Usability of & Access to Physical Activity (PA) Resources (**Figure 10**). This made up 93% of the 779 Active Living actions reported. No actions for *Shared Use Agreements* were reported, although one LIA qualitatively described the approval of a shared use agreement with the town to ensure park use for PA events without charge [MT7].

10. **In FY24, LIAs reported 722 unduplicated SEEDS Actions across three PA Resources activities.** No actions for *Shared Use Agreements* were reported.

Social Support Networks 405	Usability & Access 261
	Community Engagement 56
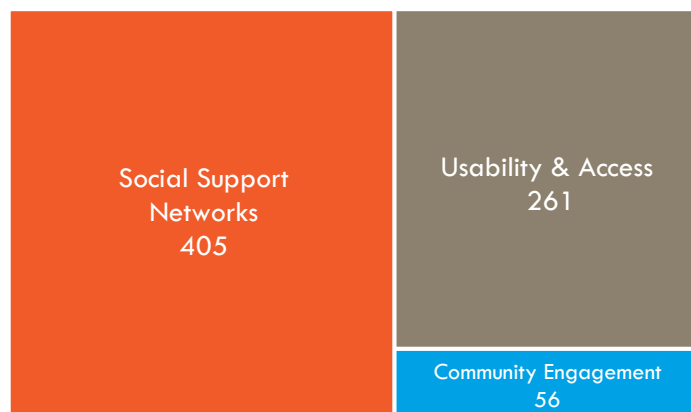
Social Support Networks. This year, four LIAs across 10 counties worked with a social support network—a type of club that encourages PA with group member support. To measure the longevity of LIAs' support for PA clubs, we compared SEEDS and SARN data from FY22-24. This year, LIAs reported 37 social support networks. Of these, 24% were established in FY24, 33% have been ongoing since FY23, and 43% have been sustained since FY22. Three networks were ongoing from FY22-23 but were not reported in FY24. This may reflect either sustained support from residents/site leaders or challenges around maintaining the networks.

Short & Long-Term Benefits. LIA narratives also highlighted three overall benefits of social support networks, detailed below.

SUSTAINABILITY (11 SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS). LIAs outlined several strategies for sustaining their social support networks. One LIA reported recruiting Park Rx Community Leads to support four networks, while other LIAs focused on identifying leaders *within* participant groups to facilitate future networks [ST6]. Some LIAs also provided technical assistance and training to staff at partner sites to build their capacity for sustaining these networks over time [ST7, LT10].

"After classes ended, the participants wanted to continue having them, so the Estrella Super Moms Leads decided to take over the classes and continue hosting and leading them for the community. **This is an example of seeing program sustainability in our work as community members take the lead.**"

-UA Cooperative Extension, Maricopa

LEVERAGED RESOURCES (18 SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS) [LT9]**.** Community partners like schools and libraries provided indoor spaces for networks when previous sites closed or weather hindered outdoor activities. Network site partners also helped with communication by sending reminders via mass text messages, newsletters, flyers, and bulletin boards. In addition to residents leading networks, one LIA highlighted that network participants volunteered for other AZ Health Zone-supported initiatives, which further strengthened resident participation.

"Our Verde Valley Trekabout hiking group is heading into our 10th year and has created long-lasting friendships, support, inclusion, and confidence. **Members assist in volunteer opportunities, Bicycle Advisory Committees events, and are planning on becoming mentors for the Prescription for Nature program** by hosting a trail day to help newcomers."

-Yavapai County Community Health Services

MEDIA COVERAGE (3 SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS) [LT8]**.** Site partners and residents actively promoted social support networks by sharing information and video content on their social media platforms. Additionally, one network received coverage in the community's local newspaper. Narratives highlighted that this media outreach effectively increased community participation in the social support networks.
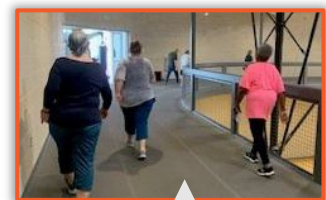
"One participant said, **'I read about the walking club in the newspaper** and was dealing with [health issues that had] led me to a completely sedentary lifestyle. Walking with you all and making friends helped me. I'm so happy [to] attend an exercise class most days!'"

-UA Cooperative Extension, Pinal

Barriers to Social Support Networks. In FY24, LIAs reported challenges in supporting social support networks, including:

Low participation from residents due to time constraints, scheduling conflicts, or lack of interest in the planned physical activities. This barrier has also been reported in previous years.

Turnover among group leaders, or times where group leaders failed to attend network activities.

Unsafe walking conditions (e.g., stray animals).

Infrastructure issues near partner sites, including closed walking paths, lack of sidewalks, or uneven pavement that made walking unsafe.

To address some of these challenges, LIAs engaged residents in identifying their preferred activities and any optimal times for scheduling events. However, residents' participation often remained low. In the future, *Social Support Networks* activities may include opportunities for LIAs to involve residents in broader BE initiatives (e.g., helping to determine sidewalk improvements) using the new walk audit tool.

> "We have been trying to get a walking club started in this community for the past year due to participant interest. However, the roadway for the two blocks between the senior center and the local community park still do not have sidewalks, and the pavement isn't smooth."
>
> *-UA Cooperative Extension, Pinal*

Community Engagement. In FY24, six LIAs across nine counties reported 56 *Community Engagement* actions under PA Resources (see **Figure 10**). Notably, the number of these actions has consistently declined from FY23 (n=158) and FY22 (n=368). However, LIAs did not share *Community Engagement* challenges in FY24 narratives, and many LIAs offered vague or no descriptions of their engagement activities. Thus, while the decline may have been partly driven by improved SEEDs reporting, more study is needed.

Nonetheless, 12 SARNs did offer details around LIAs' level of engagement (**Figure 11**). Many community engagement efforts were facilitated by the Physical Activity Resource Assessment (PARA) as LIAs engaged residents in evaluating local parks and trail systems (see Success Story, next page). Other engagement efforts focused on understanding communities' PA-related needs, identifying residents' PA interests, and gathering feedback during events to guide LIAs' future programming.

11. **In FY24, CONSULT was the most described community engagement level in the 12 narratives referencing *Community Engagement* under PA Resources.** LIAs did not describe the PRELIMINARY or INFORM levels. Narratives could address more than one level.

CONSULT 8 narratives	**INVOLVE** 4 narratives	**COLLABORATE** 3 narratives	**EMPOWER** 1 narrative
"After completing walking sessions, [we] learned through engagement that the participants were interested in yoga-inspired stretch classes."	"To [involve youth voices in creating the skate-path], we facilitated preparatory sessions with the Youth Advisory Council."	"In collaboration with community members, we assessed the new walking trail. [Resident] feedback was communicated to county partners."	"[Following PARA discussions], the youth voted to approve a [student-led] trail cleanup event."

Success Story:
Community Involvement Drives Active Living Changes

The UA Cooperative Extension, Santa Cruz made significant strides to enhance walking trails, driven by community engagement. Building on the success of previous PARAs, LIA staff involved residents in additional assessments of trails used by the students who walked to school. Community feedback emphasized the need for trail cleanups, the promotion of walk-to-school events using these trails, and the establishment of regular walking groups. This input was essential to the PSE changemaking that followed.

"A total of 25 community members—including school staff, administration, parents, students, and representatives from the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Department—participated in the PARA. **During the PARA, students expressed interest in organizing a trail cleanup and later partnered with [us] to conduct the cleanup.**"

"[Another school] also completed a youth-led cleanup of the trail closest to them. Expanding on the success of the trail cleanup, [we] introduced regular family walking groups. The initiative also led to more walk-to-school events, with school leadership actively involved in promoting these efforts. **These events not only encouraged students to engage in physical activity but also fostered a sense of community and school spirit.** The collaboration between [us], school leadership, and community members resulted in a holistic approach to promoting active living."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Santa Cruz

Coming Together for Changemaking:

Community Engagement & Partnerships Enhance Food Access

"The minute we become an integrated whole, we look through the same eyes and we see a whole different world together."

- Azizah Al-Hibri

In FY24, LIAs leveraged community engagement and partnerships to enhance food access. Collaborations with *Farmers/Growers*, libraries, businesses, and community organizations [ST7-ST8] played a key role in these efforts, contributing resources and media coverage [LT8-9]. These partnerships helped create new, local, and sustainable food access initiatives that were responsive to their communities' needs.

Community Engagement Drives A New Farmers Market, Increasing Local Food Access

"The Pima County Public Library recently emailed over 8,000 individuals with information about the market. The South Tucson Community Outreach and City of Tucson Ward 1 [have also] included PLAZA Mobile Market in their newsletters. A particularly proud moment was when County Board District 5 visited the market and then posted on Facebook about the program."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Pima

Driven by community input from focus groups, surveys, and informal conversations, the **UA Cooperative Extension, Pima** piloted the Promoting Local Arizona Agriculture (PLAZA) Mobile Market at a partner library [LT12]. The market was supplied by local farmers from an International Rescue Committee refugee resettlement program, as well as two other UA-affiliated organizations. LIA staff worked to prioritize economic stability and fair purchasing practices for farmers, while also improving food access for community residents. As such, produce was purchased at market value by LIA staff and sold at the market at a discount. Additionally, LIA staff collaborated with a James Beard award-winning local baker to offer staple goods such as bread and flour at reduced prices.

The LIA staffs' consistent presence and authentic relationships in the community have had many ripple effects. In particular, LIA efforts have helped galvanize local organizations to provide market outreach and promotional support.

After the market opened, SNAP redemptions flourished. On average, 35% of market sales were redeemed from customers' SNAP, Double Up Food Bucks, and Farmers Market Nutrition Program [MT8] benefits.

"The market has infused 2,200 pounds of food into the Sunnyside community. These are local goods that are either quite difficult or impossible for the local community to buy because of the barriers noted in [our] focus groups: transportation, cost, and the perception of being an outsider at farmers markets. **This environmental change provides access to food and has become a consistent food source that has shifted many people's purchasing habits.** [Customers] have disclosed that this is the only place that they buy local produce. This is how we know the environment has not only changed but has been embraced by community."
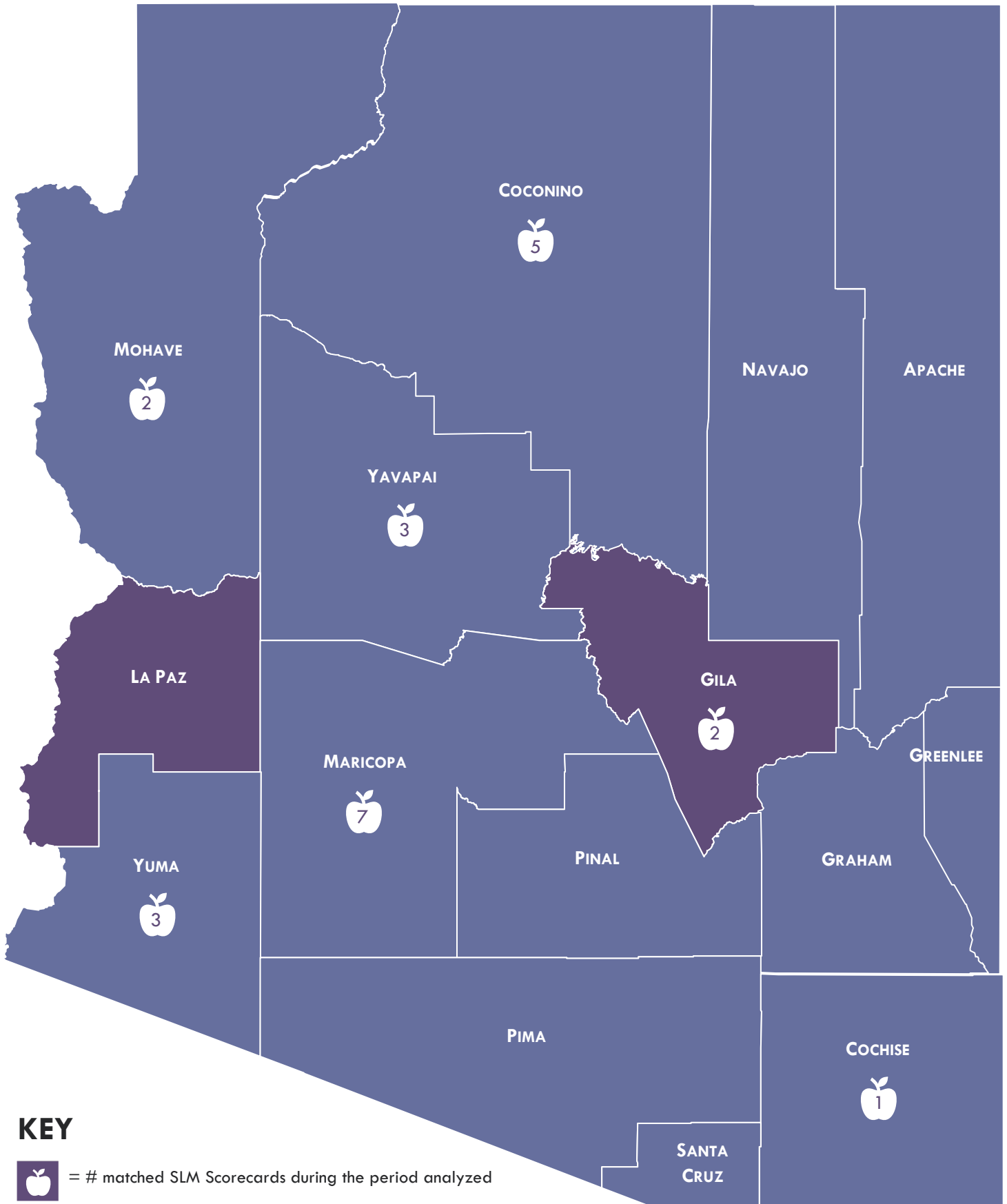
-UA Cooperative Extension, Pima

Resident Input Shapes the Wilson Community Center's New Food Pantry

Volunteers built pantry shelves purchased through a community organization partnership.

The **UA Cooperative Extension, Maricopa** supported a local community center to launch a new food pantry in Phoenix's Wilson neighborhood. To promote the development of the community-centered pantry and build trust with residents, LIA staff distributed a trilingual (English, Somali, and Spanish) survey and held bilingual (English and Spanish) focus groups to gather feedback. Focus group participants were asked about their food access challenges; their preferred food items; and whether they preferred a grab-and-go food box model, a choice-based shopping model, or a mix of both models.

Community partners purchased equipment for the pantry and volunteered their time for set-up. The pantry opened in November and aims to supplement their shelves with produce from nearby community and school gardens [MT5].

COCONINO 🍎 5

MOHAVE 🍎 2

NAVAJO

APACHE

YAVAPAI 🍎 3

LA PAZ

GILA 🍎 2

GREENLEE

MARICOPA 🍎 7

PINAL

GRAHAM

YUMA 🍎 3

PIMA

COCHISE 🍎 1

SANTA CRUZ

KEY

🍎 = # matched SLM Scorecards during the period analyzed

■ = Worked in School & Other Youth-Based Systems, only

■ = Worked in both ECE and School & Other Youth-Based Systems

Childhood Focus

AZ Health Zone Childhood Strategies

Support the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies that promote nutrition and physical activity in **Early Care & Education (ECE)-Based Systems**

Support the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies that promote nutrition and physical activity in **School & Other Youth-Based Systems**
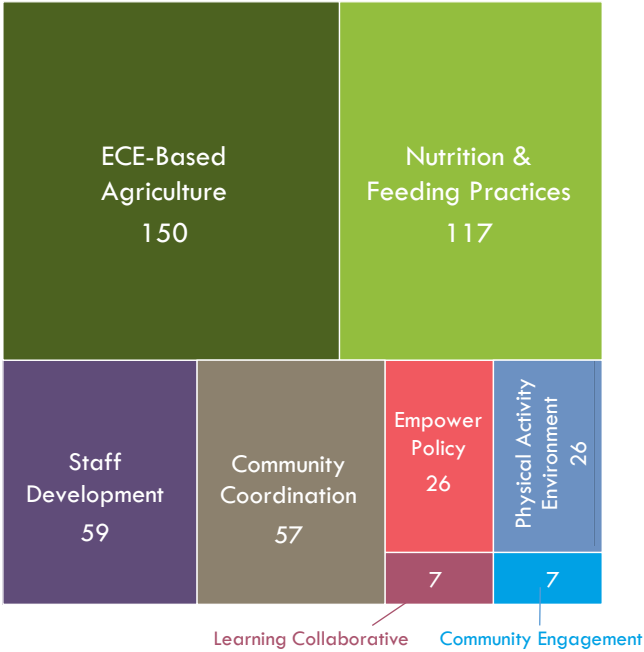
Evaluating ECE-Based Systems

In FY24, five AZ Health Zone Local Implementing Agencies (LIAs) worked in ECE-Based Systems across 13 of Arizona's 15 counties, and LIAs reported their ECE Systems actions in the SNAP-Ed Electronic Data System (SEEDS). The State Evaluation Team (SET) combined SEEDS data with data from the Semi-Annual Report Narratives (SARNs) to evaluate progress in LIA-ECE partnerships, *Learning Collaboratives*, *Community Coordination*, and *Community Engagement* [ST7-8, MT5-6, LT5-11].

LIA Activity Patterns Are Changing

In FY24, LIAs largely focused on supporting *ECE-Based Agriculture* and *Nutrition & Feeding Practices* (**Figure 12**). These were also the two most popular activities in FY23. However this year, the proportion of *Agriculture* actions to all ECE actions grew by 10%, while the proportion of *Nutrition* actions dropped by 8%. This suggests that LIAs are gaining momentum supporting ECE gardens, perhaps shifting some of their focus away from non-gardening nutrition activities and toward garden-related nutrition. There was also a 5% increase in the proportion of actions reported as *Community Coordination* and a 4% decrease in the proportion reported as *Community Engagement*. Here, it is likely that the State Implementation Team (SIT)'s SEEDS review process led LIAs to more accurately report *Community Engagement* and re-classify some of these actions as *Community Coordination*.

12. In FY24, LIAs reported 449 unduplicated SEEDS actions across the eight ECE Systems activities, down 17% from the 543 reported the prior year.

ECE-Based Agriculture
150

Nutrition & Feeding Practices
117

Staff Development
59

Community Coordination
57

Empower Policy
26

Physical Activity Environment
26

7

7

Learning Collaborative

Community Engagement

24

More generally, LIAs reported fewer overall SEEDS actions in FY24 compared to FY23. Decreases were spread across six of the eight ECE Systems activities. We looked to LIAs' narratives to learn more about waning ECE support and found that years-long challenges to programming beyond LIA control have not been effectively addressed: Of the 38 SARNs that referenced ECE Systems barriers, 34 (89%) related to a lack of the ECE partner's interest and/or capacity, generally due to competing demands combined with staffing shortages. This pattern has persisted since the SET's first ECE evaluation report in FY16. In other words, ECE partners continue to view SNAP-Ed-supported interventions as competing with other, higher ranking priorities within Arizona's ECE system amid widespread staffing shortages.

> "Despite ongoing efforts, [we] face persistent challenges in recruiting sites to participate in Go NAPSACC assessments. [After] exploring various recruitment strategies, **our team feels as if it has reached an impasse, with few viable options remaining short of mandating participation or completing assessments on behalf of sites**—neither of which align with our collaborative approach. Additionally, this preschool is grappling with significant concerns regarding the sustainability of its funding...amidst these pressing issues, participation in supplementary programs such as SNAP-Ed may understandably take a backseat."
>
> *-UA Cooperative Extension, Cochise*

LIA Partnerships with ECE Organizations

SEEDS. This year, LIAs reported 58 active partnerships with ECE providers and other ECE-related organizations, a 26% increase from the 46 partnerships reported two years prior [ST7a, ST8a]. These partnerships spanned *fewer* Arizona counties (10 in FY24 versus 13 in FY22), with no ECE partnerships reported in Graham, Pinal, or Santa Cruz this year.

SARNs. LIAs in 12 counties (including Graham, Pinal and Santa Cruz) shared their ECE progress in 72 SARNs. Nearly all of these descriptions (n=70) offered information about the depth of the LIA's relationship with ECE partners [ST7b, ST8c]. Our qualitative analysis of these reports mirrored our FY22 analysis (page 19), letting us explore the question: *How have LIA partnerships with ECE organizations, including providers and other community partners, changed over time?*

Figure 13 shows that, as in FY22, the depth of LIAs' relationships with partners varied from *difficulty starting or maintaining relationships* to *well-established relationships* around rich PSE and multilevel interventions. And, as in FY22, this variation was seen across *and within*

LIAs as relationships with each partner evolved uniquely. However, as highlighted in **Figure 13**, there were notable changes in relationship depth over time. This year, relatively fewer ECE-focused narratives described *low-intensity relationships* (-20%), and relatively more shared *difficulty starting or maintaining relationships* (+24%), *maturing relationships* around PSE and multi-level interventions (+14%), and *starting or rebuilding relationships* (+13%). Meanwhile, the proportion of SARNs describing *well-established relationships* around rich PSE and multilevel interventions remained steady at 36%.

While the majority of partnership descriptions were with ECE providers, some were with other types of local and regional partners. Most notably, LIAs in five counties discussed their Arizona First Things First partnerships: LIAs in Cochise and Pima reported that First Things First representatives were involved in two local coalitions, while LIAs in Maricopa, Santa Cruz, and Yavapai described successful partnerships with First Things First Child Care Health Consultants (CCHCs) to coordinate site-

13. In FY24, 70 narrative reports described LIA relationships with ECE partners [ST7b]. Compared to FY22, relatively more narratives discussed maturing relationships as well as difficulty starting or maintaining relationships.

DEEPENING RELATIONSHIPS [ST7b]
Increasing communication, coordination, cooperation, & collaboration

36% described **WELL-ESTABLISHED RELATIONSHIPS** with rich PSE and multilevel interventions (14 communities in 6 counties), the same as in FY22.

> "[We now send] training information to all centers directly through the Child-Parent Centers' internal communication app, increasing teachers' ability to attend. This would not have been possible without the long-standing relationship we have with Child-Parent Centers."

47% described **MATURING RELATIONSHIPS** around PSE and multilevel interventions (26 communities in 11 counties), up from 33% in FY22.

> "[We] built a strong relationship with [the ECE provider] through consistent communication, which allowed us to understand the site's needs, availability, and priorities. As a result, they completed the Go NAPSACC assessment."

11% described **LOW-INTENSITY RELATIONSHIPS** via materials share-outs and direct education (7 communities in 5 counties), down from 31% in FY22.

> "[We] continue to drop off kid-friendly recipes for [our partner] Head Start to send home to families in their newsletters."

34% described **STARTING OR REBUILDING RELATIONSHIPS** with no or starter interventions (16 communities in 9 counties), up from 21% in FY22.

> "[A new] Head Start reached out for programming [similar to] what we did with two other Head Starts."

36% described **DIFFICULTY STARTING OR MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS** (21 communities in 10 counties), up from 12% in FY22.

> "Recently, [the ECE] director and key garden champion resigned at the same time. With these departures, we have lost our connections to this site."

level support for health-related interventions such as Go NAPSACC. The Maricopa County Department of Public Health also shared plans to further support First Things First-funded school food pantries to enhance food security during early childhood.

Partnerships Linked to Positive Outcomes

This year, many ECE-related narratives (72%, or 52 of 72) included accomplishments that grew out of partnerships. The most reported short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes focused on *ECE-Based Agriculture*—usually ECE gardens—with and without the help of the Go NAPSACC's Farm to ECE module. **Figure 14** summarizes the garden outcomes reported by LIAs in 24 communities, with examples.

> "The CCHC, who has several years of experience and is well-trusted within the local ECE community, worked closely with our existing ECE staff member. Together, [we] developed a community engagement plan to recruit new and existing ECE sites to participate in Go NAPSACC, develop action plans focused on nutrition and physical activity, and implement professional development… **SNAP-Ed and CCHC staff personally visited each site to introduce themselves as a team, which helped forge new relationships.**"
>
> *-UA Cooperative Extension, Santa Cruz*

14. In FY24, many narratives described how LIAs came together with ECE partners to accomplish SHORT-, MEDIUM-, and LONG-TERM outcomes in *ECE-Based Agriculture*.

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES	LONG-TERM OUTCOMES
enhanced readiness to adopt garden-related changes [ST7c]. They were reported in	reflected the adoption of garden-related changes [MT5d]. They were reported in	nurtured the changes that were already adopted [LT5a,10]. They were reported in
11	**6**	**7**
communities across 8 counties.	communities across 3 counties.	communities across 5 counties.

"We had [Head Start training] participants plan their ideal gardens, brainstorm the supplies needed and [how] to source those for free, designate responsibilities, and think about how to incorporate the garden into classroom and parent engagement activities. [We] also provided ideas for how to creatively incorporate the garden into other lessons, such as math, science and language."

-Mohave County Dept. of Public Health

"A Farm to ECE action plan was made [with multiple partners]: The groundskeeper placed the stock tanks, extended the irrigation, and delivered dirt to fill the tanks. The Master Gardeners installed two extra beds for sunflowers and herbs. We provided one stock tank, soil, and compost donated from another Master Gardener. [An ECE teacher] led groups of preschoolers to help with the planting."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Yavapai

"We [partnered] to sustain the on-site garden…The ECE staff routinely took the kids to plant, harvest, and learn about what they were growing. We checked in with advice on garden maintenance, pest management, and types of crops that fit the region. The students and garden leaders chose which crops to plant, and the on-site cook used recipes that contain the produce the kids are growing in their garden."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Mohave

Beyond *ECE-Based-Agriculture*, the outcomes that emerged from successful LIA-ECE provider partnerships spanned a variety of nutrition and physical activity topics: center-based meal preparation and consumption, physical activity PSEs, Go NAPSACC progress, *Color Me Healthy* implementation, and the marketing and implementation of Arizona's revised Empower standards. Most of these achievements involved ECE *Staff Development*. They reflected short-term outcomes [ST7c] when LIA trainings *preceded* the adoption of PSE changes and long-term outcomes [LT5a,10] when trainings *reinforced* the ECE provider's ongoing PSE implementation. A few FY24 narratives also described the adoption of one or more non-gardening PSE changes [MT5,6].

"[Our] new early childhood team member swiftly established robust relationships with the district's preschool cohort and CCHCs. Following an Empower training session with all ECE staff members, **we received an invitation to convene with lead teachers to develop an Empower guidebook tailored to the district preschools' needs.** We printed the revised Empower Standards and collaborated with the lead teachers in a workgroup session to customize the standards to align with district policies."
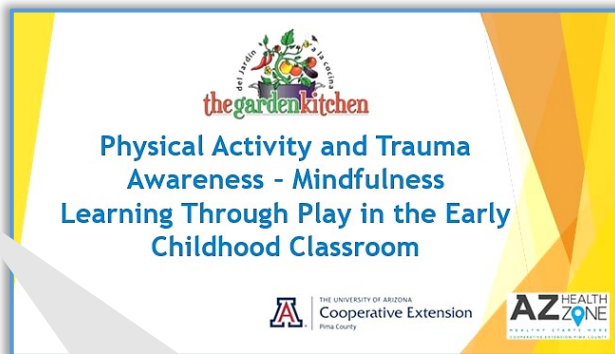
-UA Cooperative Extension, Cochise

Other positive outcomes in SARNs included community- and regional-level achievements that grew out of collaborations with a variety of ECE partners beyond single sites.

These are discussed in the subsequent sections that cover *Learning Collaboratives, Community Engagement,* and *Community Coordination.*

Success Story: A Pima County Partnership Expands Reach & Deepens Impact

This year, the UA Cooperative Extension, Pima intensified its partnership with the [Child-Parent Centers](#) (CPC)'s regional Head Start program. First, the LIA expanded the reach of their ongoing, trauma-informed professional development workshops by working directly with CPC Education Coordinators [LT9$_c$]. Next, they launched a Culinary Training Collaboration with CPC to positively impact CPC Head Start center and home food environments [MT5$_{c,f}$].

Physical Activity and Trauma Awareness – Mindfulness Learning Through Play in the Early Childhood Classroom

"The Culinary Training Collaboration program completed its first cohort with seven parents from centers across several communities. **[We] prepared participants to work or volunteer in CPC kitchens** through six modules on food safety, knife skills, cooking skills, child nutrition, menu modification, and a shadowing session at the participant's child's center. The cohort concluded with two parents earning a certificate and one applying to work for CPC."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Pima

"Capacity of ECE staff and scheduling had been consistent challenges, **but [we were] able to facilitate a systems change by regularly meeting with the group of CPC Education Coordinators,** [which improved] access to each CPC cluster's schedule and communication with each center's lead staff."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Pima

Finally, the partnership expanded to include the CPC Home Visitor Program. This allowed trusted LIA staff to visit homes alongside the CPC's lead staff and provide gardening support [MT5$_{c,d,f}$].

Participants learned to harvest seasonally flourishing verdolagas.
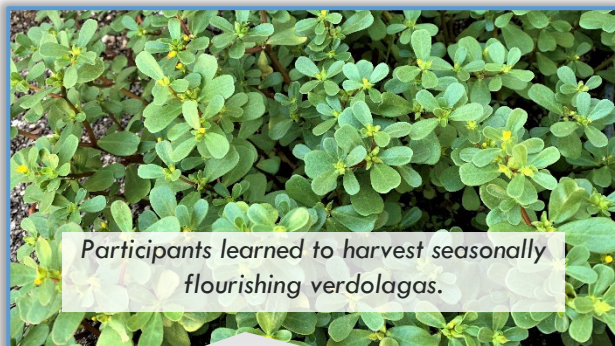
"[We provided one] Head Start Home Visitor program with a field trip, where participants were guided through harvesting verdolagas (purslane), the main ingredient in [our] food demonstration. This was a significant activity...verdolagas are a local, culturally relevant food, which prompted families to share their personal experiences and various methods of cooking with them. [And,] **because verdolagas are nutritious and abundant during the monsoon season, this [linked to our] discussion around food access and food security.**"

-UA Cooperative Extension, Pima

Learning Collaboratives

Over the past two years, we measured a drastic (90%) decline in the number of SEEDS-reported *Learning Collaborative* actions, primarily due to the 2022 end of the Nemours "Better Together" Go NAPSACC learning collaboratives. Indeed, in FY22, all but one of the 73 *Learning Collaborative* actions related to Better Together participation.

Compared to SEEDS, the FY24 SARNs offered more accurate and comprehensive depictions of LIAs' *Learning Collaborative* activities, with these distinct projects: cross-county plans for *Color Me Healthy* training (later adapted into a single LIA training for one Coconino ECE provider); a Farm to ECE learning collaborative established by the UA Cooperative Extension, Yavapai in their Southwest Hub; a Culinary Training Collaborative and a series of ongoing cross-community professional development workshops delivered by the UA Cooperative Extension, Pima (see **Success Story** above); and regional Head Start All Staff learning sessions hosted by the health departments in Yuma and Mohave (see **Success Story** below).

Thus, since FY22, a subset of LIAs have begun to experiment with learning collaboratives to (1) reach broader local and regional audiences and (2) connect individual ECE providers with the LIA *and* with one another. Moreover, while none of this work mimicked the original Go NAPSACC learning collaboratives, three projects did use Go NAPSACC, either as a part of the learning collaborative process or as a logical next step after participating in the collaborative.

Success Story:
Cross-County Learning Collaboratives Catalyze Action in Mohave & Yuma

The health departments in Mohave and Yuma Counties partnered to meet the Western Arizona Council of Government (WACOG)'s request for regional learning opportunities for all Head Start staff. The LIAs worked together to develop a series of well-attended, interactive sessions around the new Empower standards and ECE gardens, which in turn spurred new interest in regional- and site-level action.

What type of training or technical assistance would you need to grow gardens at your center? (Discussion)

"[Our LIAs] worked together to provide the same training to peak interest on Farm to ECE...**I had over 80 participants total for my two garden sessions,** so there was definitely interest from the group."

-*Yuma County Public Health Services District*

EMPOWER Policies

Newly Updated Standards as of July 2023

"[**Our**] **first session was a focus group-style discussion of the Empower Program**...[Participants] worked in small groups, sharing successes and barriers from their sites. Then, we got back together and compiled the responses. We shared them with Head Start leadership to continue to guide work around re-writing the Head Start Empower policies [MT5,6]."

-*Mohave County Department of Public Health*

Following the ECE gardening sessions, WACOG reached out to the LIAs for continued, in-depth learning opportunities. In response, both LIAs set an expectation that centers complete a Go NAPSACC Farm to ECE assessment prior to receiving more tailored technical assistance, and WACOG agreed [ST7c].

Community Coordination

"Great things are done by a series of small things brought together."

-Vincent Van Gogh

The AZ Health Zone considers *Community Coordination* to be the coming together of three or more partners around a shared PSE goal. From FY22-24, the number of SEEDS-reported *Community Coordination* actions have hovered between 40-60, constituting a modest proportion of all ECE Systems actions. However, LIAs can also report *Community Coordination* activities under the topical focus of their efforts (ex., *ECE-Based Agriculture*), so SEEDS counts must be interpreted with caution. For example, this year the UA Cooperative Extension, Yavapai continued its years-long work coordinating with a variety of partner organizations around Nature Niños, electing to report its 22 SEEDS actions under *Physical Activity Environment*. The LIA then used their end-year SARN to provide more information about Nature Niños operations and successes, including *Community Coordination*.

Thus, we analyzed narrative reports in FY22 and FY24 to better understand how *Community Coordination* has changed over time. In FY22, LIAs described this activity in 12 communities. In FY24, descriptions expanded considerably to cover 23 communities [ST7-8]. The most-cited partners—in order of their frequency—were regional and individual Head Start organizations, First Things First, Master Gardeners, school districts (with preschools), Chicanos Por La Causa, Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and tribal organizations. In some cases, work that had begun two years prior developed to include new initiatives and/or partners. In other cases, new collaborative networks formed. Of note, SARNs describing partnerships with First Things First included new and deepening work with CCHCs in four counties (seven communities) as well as a Regional Advisory Team in Maricopa County.

Success Story: Community Coordination Reinvigorates Breastfeeding Support

"One of the key achievements of the Cochise County Breastfeeding Taskforce is the consistent and diverse attendance at meetings, representing various spheres of lactation work, including the health department, WIC, pediatricians, preschool teachers, and program leads. [This year,] a graduate student researched [local] breastfeeding intent and outcomes, focusing on Latinx families...**Research findings [and subsequent] Task Force discussions revitalized the Breastfeeding Friendly Recognition Program** [ST7$_{a-c}$]. [We took] the lead redesigning the program guidebook to embrace trauma-informed practices and make it applicable to a wider range of partner organizations. Efforts are [also] underway to integrate the program into Empower training to improve lactation spaces and practices for ECE families and staff. Participating organizations can receive formal recognition from the Cochise County Board of Supervisors."

"The resurgence of this program and the graduate research have highlighted the critical need for lactation support at ECE sites and underscored the importance of partnerships with other programs to expand the current scope. [The resulting efforts have also] spurred collaborations between ECE and school health leads, particularly concerning preschools linked to elementary schools. **Many preschools must navigate their school rules, emphasizing the need for coordination and cooperation. This has led to School Health Advisory Council involvement to support the recognition program and promote its success."**

-UA Cooperative Extension, Cochise

Community Engagement

The AZ Health Zone describes *Community Engagement* as direct resident engagement. In FY24, LIAs reported just seven ECE *Community Engagement* actions in SEEDS, compared to 13 in FY22 and 33 in FY23. As noted previously, the decline likely reflects improved reporting. In addition, ECE *Community Engagement* has been consistently low relative to most other strategies throughout this five-year plan cycle. In narratives, LIAs continued to describe difficulties connecting directly with families with young children—especially when ECE providers played a gatekeeper role and had limited availability to support these connections.

Nonetheless, LIAs did describe four *Community Engagement* activities in this year's SARNs.

LIAs in Cochise, Santa Cruz, Yavapai, and Yuma used events and surveys to collect caregiver feedback on existing and future programming. For example, the UA Cooperative Extension, Cochise sought residents' input on their Curious Quails Youth-Nature Program to inform planning and site selection:

"By prioritizing community input and engagement, [we] **ensure that Curious Quails is grounded in the needs and interests of the community** and remains relevant to the targeted age group."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Cochise

Success Story: An LIA-Provider Relationship Spurs Caregiver Engagement

"**In collaboration with the [ECE] site, [we] worked to engage parents in the Go NAPSACC goals and outcomes.** The [provider] helped us to develop a parent survey aimed at understanding fruit juice consumption practices and awareness. The survey was designed to tailor parent education, increase water intake, and reduce sugary beverage consumption."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Santa Cruz

While LIAs generally struggled with ECEs as gatekeepers, the UA Cooperative Extension, Santa Cruz leveraged their strong LIA-provider relationship to *reach* caregivers. First, LIA staff cultivated their ECE partnership. Next, they supported the provider in completing a Go NAPSACC assessment. The LIA then helped their partner to develop and implement an action plan. In addition to direct education and monthly ECE staff development sessions, the UA Santa Cruz support included family engagement to advance Go NAPSACC goals.

Applying a Systems Lens to ECE Partnerships

Together, the ECE findings suggest that some LIAs have effectively nurtured interorganizational relationships to progress several SNAP-Ed-supported changes that respond to communities' ECE-related needs and interests (blue circle). However, without addressing persistent systemic barriers (pink ring)—which we generally found to be barriers outside of SNAP-Ed's unique scope—LIAs may be unable to progress their work more broadly into desired areas and communities (green ring).

ECE Provider & Other Partner Turnover

While select interorganizational collaborations deepened past superficial supports, they cannot breach systemic barriers.

Competition for Providers' Time & Resources

## Evaluating School & Other Youth-Based Systems

This year, all seven AZ Health Zone Local Implementing Agencies (LIAs) continued to support School & Other Youth-Based Systems across Arizona's 15 counties. Per the FY24 AZ Health Zone Evaluation Framework, we focused our FY24 evaluation of this strategy on *Nutrition Practices & Environment*, measuring changes in school lunchrooms [MT5; LT5,7] using the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement (SLM) Scorecard. We set the confidence level for this evaluation at 90% (p≤0.10) due to the modest sample size (n=23). We also referenced Semi-Annual Report Narratives (SARNs) to learn more.

How Did LIA Reporting Change Over Time?

From FY23 to FY24, LIAs continued to be especially active in School & Other Youth-Based Systems compared to the other AZ Health Zone strategies. However, their total number of reported SEEDS actions across the eight School Systems activities experienced a modest decline (**Figure 15**). The two most popular activities in FY23, *Nutrition Practices & Environment* and *School-Based Agriculture*, remained so this year, albeit with decreases in their overall numbers. In contrast, the proportion of *Physical Activity Practices & Environment* actions to the total number of School Systems actions experienced a notable increase, up 5% from the previous year. Thus, while LIAs continued to focus on nutrition-related interventions, they added more physical activity support this year. In addition, the proportion of *Community Engagement* actions to all School Systems actions decreased by 3% from FY23, which may at least partly reflect continued, improved reporting. Meanwhile, the proportion of *Community Coordination* actions had dropped from FY21-23 but remained steady during the past two years at just under 3% of all School Systems actions.

In terms of action *types*, nearly all reported direct education (553 of 568 actions, or 97%) fell under *Nutrition Practices & Environment* and *School-Based Agriculture*, while nearly all *Physical Activity Practices & Environment* actions (129 of 130, or 99%) were reported under PSEs. Even so, the delineation between direct education and PSE actions was not

15. In FY24, LIAs reported 1,642 unduplicated SEEDS actions across all School & Other Youth-Based Systems activities, down 13% from the 1,882 reported in FY23.
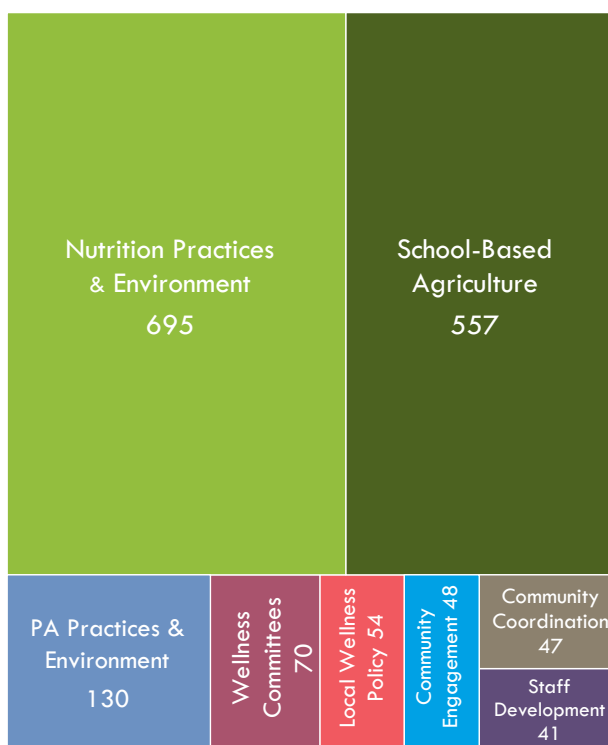
well-defined: Over half of the 1,074 PSE actions (53%) were recorded as events, which were often noted in SEEDS to be brief LIA-youth interactions—including one-time lessons (e.g., "digestion talk," "food demo," "mindful tasting activity," "nutrition lesson," "PA bingo activity"). Meetings, which made up 47% of PSE actions, tended to more clearly support settings-level PSE changes (e.g., "grant application assistance, "Local Wellness Policy results," "set SLM goals," soil installment," "sustainability meeting").
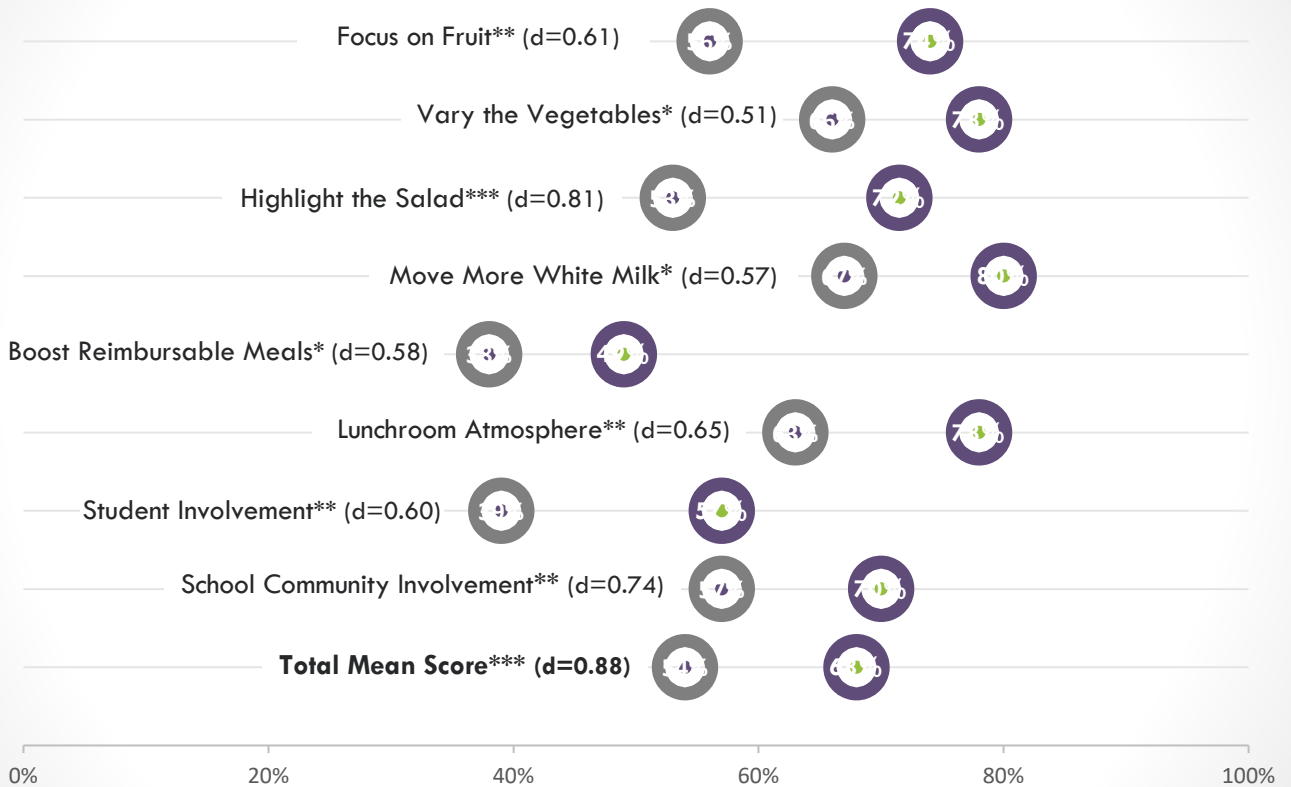
The SLM Scorecard. Between October 2021 and September 2024, six LIAs supported 23 schools in seven counties through the SLM's path to improvement (**Figure 16**). They submitted 23 matched pre-post Scorecards. Of the participating schools, the majority (87%) operated with full kitchens, and the rest (13%) operated using heat-and-serve. LIAs involved, collaborated with, or empowered cafeteria managers in all (100%) of SLM Scorecards, and cafeteria staff in most (74%) of Scorecards.

How Did Scores Change? On average, the total SLM score and all section scores improved from baseline to follow-up [LT5$_c$] (**Figure 17**).

16. The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement (SLM) includes 4 steps for improving lunchrooms. The first and last steps involve **completing the SLM Scorecard.**

1. **SPOT!** Complete the baseline SLM Scorecard.

2. **PLAN!** Develop an action plan based on Step 1.

3. **DO!** Implement the Step 2 action plan.

4. **PROVE!** Complete a follow-up SLM Scorecard.

17. From Step 1 to Step 4 of the SLM, all mean section scores increased significantly, with medium to large effects (n=23). Scores were calculated as a % of the maximum possible for each section.

Focus on Fruit** (d=0.61)
Vary the Vegetables* (d=0.51)
Highlight the Salad*** (d=0.81)
Move More White Milk* (d=0.57)
Boost Reimbursable Meals* (d=0.58)
Lunchroom Atmosphere** (d=0.65)
Student Involvement** (d=0.60)
School Community Involvement** (d=0.74)
Total Mean Score*** (d=0.88)

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

*p≤0.05, **p≤0.01, ***p≤0.001, effect sizes reported as Cohen's d

18. **Many of the 23 schools that completed pre and post SLM Scorecards showed improvements in their section and total scores.**

SCORECARD SECTION   # OF SCHOOLS WITH SCORE INCREASES [LT5$_c$]

Section	# of schools
FOCUS ON FRUIT	13
VARY THE VEGETABLES	15
HIGHLIGHT THE SALAD	12
MOVE MORE WHITE MILK	13
BOOST REIMBURSABLE MEALS	15
LUNCHROOM ATMOSPHERE	15
STUDENT INVOLVEMENT	15
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT	14
TOTAL SCORE	17
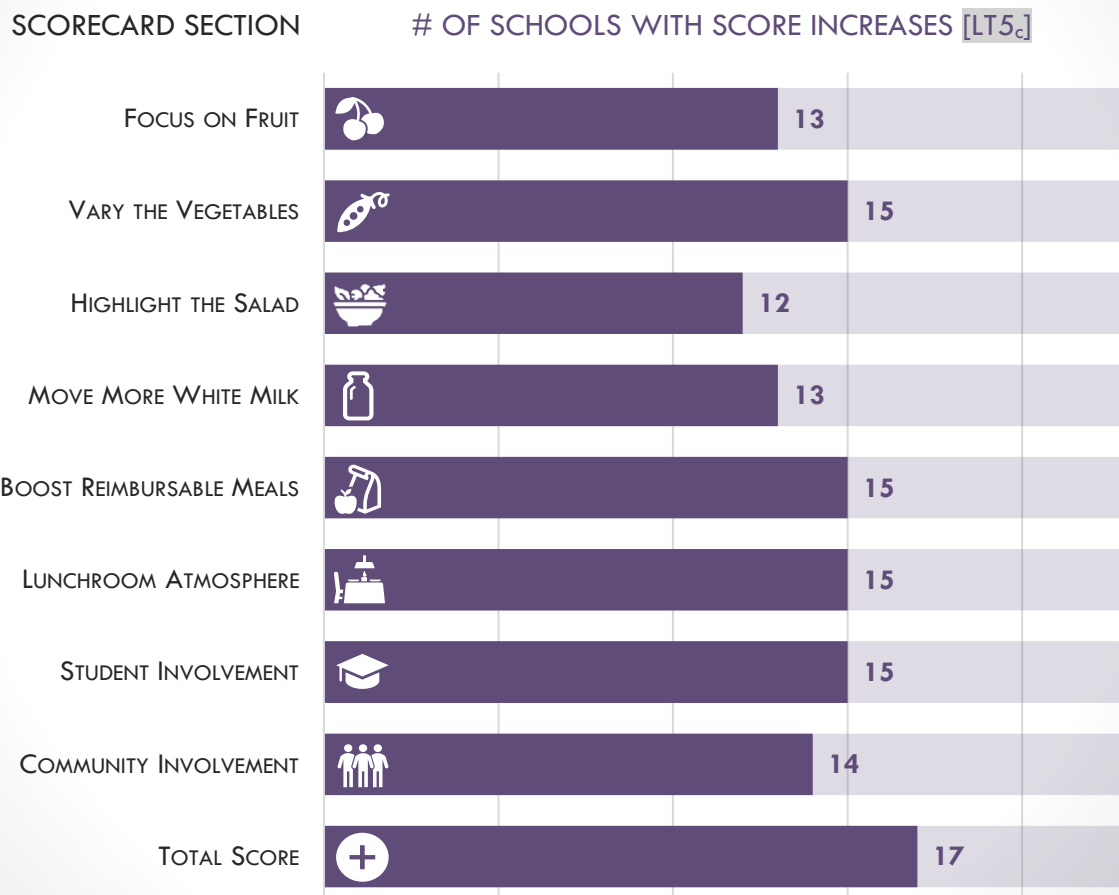
Total SLM scores improved for 74% (17) of the 23 participating schools (**Figure 18**). Most of these schools also experienced increases in SLM section scores that reflected actual PSE changes made to lunchrooms and lunchroom operations. Indeed, LIAs' FY24 narratives detailed many of the actual SLM improvements made, including two changes that tied the SLM to written wellness policies [MT5$_b$], seven systems changes (e.g. reading the lunch menu with announcements, offering taste tests) [MT5$_c$], and 28 environmental changes (e.g., labeling the foods served with creative names, hanging nutrition posters along meal lines and in dining areas, displaying fruit in decorative baskets, painting murals) [MT5$_d$].

"The Food Services Director said, 'The walls were plain white, pretty boring. That's too bad because **a lunchroom should be a fun place to hang out with your friends.'** He received permission from the District administration and facilities to paint murals in the cafeterias. **With thought to the 'Student Involvement' section of the SLM scorecard, he recruited a student artist to help paint the murals.** In addition, the cafeterias were named after the school's mascot, and new posters with fun food puns were on display. Additionally, items along the salad bar and serving lines were labeled with creative names."

-Coconino County Health & Human Services

Background: An "Eat a Rainbow" mural painted in a Coconino school enhanced the lunchroom atmosphere.

Relationships Between SLM Scores & LIA Support.
We also examined the SEEDS actions reported under *Nutrition Practices & Environment—SLM* to explore score differences between groups with different levels of LIA support. For each of the 23 schools, we isolated the 80 actions that LIAs reported between their Step 1 and Step 4 Scorecards and created three groups of schools: those with *no* (0) *actions*, *some* (1-4) *actions*, and *many* (5+) *actions*. Our hypothesis was that the school groups with SLM support (*some* and *many actions*) would have greater score increases than the group with no support (*no actions*).

We found partial support for this hypothesis. Total SLM scores increased significantly more with large effects in the *some actions* group compared to the *no actions* group (**Figure 19**), as did scores for four of the Scorecard's eight sections. Differences between the *many actions* and *no actions* groups were less pronounced: Total SLM scores did increase more in schools with *many* versus *no* actions, but the difference was non-significant with a medium effect size. Together, these findings suggest that schools that received a moderate amount of LIA support experienced the most improvement in their SLM scores. When we removed spurious associations already found at pre, we detected a small overall effect of LIA actions on scores.

Looking deeper at SEEDS data, it was clear that, despite being accurately reported, LIAs' SLM-related support was not often found under *Nutrition Practices & Environment–SLM*. For example, in FY24 many LIAs recorded SLM activities as a part of broader initiatives, e.g. *Local Wellness Policy* and *Nutrition Practices & Environment—Other*. Thus, it is likely that SLM support was undercounted. Moreover, SEEDS did not capture the intensity of the LIA action in a systematic way, so action counts did not directly reflect the intensity of LIA support.

Looking to FY24 SARNs to learn more about LIAs' level of support, we found further evidence that their SNAP-Ed activities stimulated SLM improvements. In FY24 alone, LIAs described SLM progress in 18 of the 23 schools (78%) that were quantitatively analyzed. In some cases, the LIA did not detail their specific contribution to the changes made:

> "The elementary school and its food liaison coordinator made lots of improvements—including adding nutritional posters to the walls where there had been no decorations before—and **raised their score to the top of the silver level** [LT5$_c$, 7$_b$]."
>
> *-Yavapai County Health & Human Services*

In other cases, the LIA used SARNs to share how SNAP-Ed support contributed to changemaking, providing insight into the intensity of their work:

> "The new food service director and school chef [asked us for] professional development on SLM techniques that nudge students to choose reimbursable meal components. During the training, food service staff shared struggles with students not wanting to take all three meal components. **They [decided to] set up a share table and post signs nudging students to select at least three components** [MT5$_d$]. **[We] provided signage to support implementation.**"
>
> *-UA Cooperative Extension, Mohave*

19. On average, total SLM scores increased most in schools that received SOME reported SLM support. Support was measured by the number of SLM-specific actions reported in SEEDS.

This difference was significant: p≤0.10, d=1.08 (large effect).

MEAN SCORE INCREASE

NONE (0 actions) n=7	SOME (1-4 actions) n=8	MANY (5+ actions) n=8
2.1	13.4	9.0

Did Improvements Differ by Type of School? We next explored how SLM scores changed for schools serving different grade levels and in different geographical regions. There were no clear differences between schools in urban areas (n=12), towns (n=7), and rural areas (n=4). This suggests that, at least for this small sample, the SLM may be broadly useful across different geographical contexts.

We did detect minor differences in SLM score increases for elementary schools (n=17) versus middle and high schools (n=6), though these were statistically non-significant. Elementary schools had a somewhat higher mean score increase in Focus on Fruit than middle and high schools, while middle and high schools had greater gains in Boost Reimbursable Meals and School Community Involvement— all with small effects. Thus, there may be subtle differences between schools serving different grades in terms of which SLM items they view as more or less applicable. The SET's FY25 plans to add "not applicable" to select items, and to revise items that users have identified as more grade-level-specific, may enhance the Scorecard's utility across grades.

Success Story: LIA Support Contributes to SLM Sustainability in Maricopa

The Maricopa County Department of Public Health has supported the SLM in multiple schools since FY22. One partner district has incorporated the SLM into its Local Wellness Policy, requiring annual Scorecard completion. To date, this district's two SNAP-Ed eligible elementary and middle schools have completed three full SLM cycles, one per year, and are on track to complete another. Both schools worked to achieve and then maintain gold-level award status across all three years [LT5$_c$, LT7$_{a-c}$].
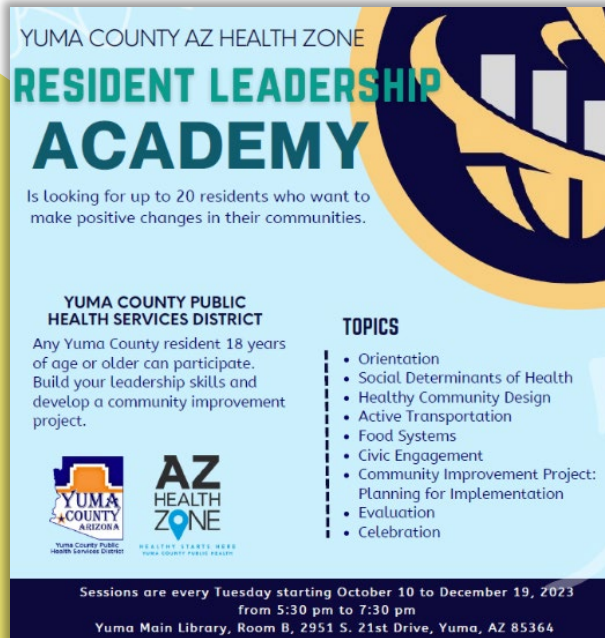
"[We] **provided monthly guidance and incentives to facilitate SLM changes.** One month, [we shared] information with each school on the importance of fruits and veggies at the point of sale and distributed a basket to place by the register (photo, top left). Another month, we provided guidance on reimbursable meals (photo, above), [and then] we shared the SLM mealtime posters...We [supported] label creation for salads and sandwiches with the Wellness Coordinator, which included the item name and a 'made with care by' statement (photo, bottom left). According to the SLM, adding descriptive names and the 'made by' statement can increase consumption…

"We [also] **explored new strategies to make healthy options more appealing and accessible to students.** This included optimizing cafeteria layouts, introducing creative marketing techniques, and involving students in menu planning to encourage healthier eating habits."

-Maricopa County Department of Public Health

Coming Together for Changemaking:

Yuma Trains Residents as Community Advocates

The Yuma SNAP-Ed team lead an inaugural 14-member cohort in late 2023, with 11 graduating.

Yuma has more community leaders, thanks to the inaugural Resident Leadership Academy (RLA), implemented for the first time this year by the Yuma Public Health Services District's AZ Health Zone team. The nine-week program graduated 11 participants trained in the skills and tools needed to support nutrition-related and other community change initiatives.

Community engagement is an AZ Health Zone Guiding Principle, with a vision that community residents contribute to the direction and priorities of each local SNAP-Ed program through feedback loops created by Local Implementing Agencies (LIAs). Opportunities to involve residents may need to be identified, encouraged, and/or cultivated.

Yuma's RLA program capitalized on this vision by training residents to advocate for community changes they identified. The weekly, two-hour classes focused on topics such as the social determinants of health, healthy community design, food systems, active transportation, civic engagement, and leadership. The series utilized diverse learning activities including presentations, interactive engagement, guest speakers, and written reflections. At the end of the series, a community improvement project provided a chance for participants to apply their learnings.

The Community Improvement Project as a Capstone Experience

An important element of the RLA was for participants to put their learnings into practice by conducting a community improvement project. The cohort engaged in these project phases:

IDENTIFY WAYS THEY ARE LEADERS WITHIN THEIR INTERCONNECTED NETWORKS

CONSIDER ALL THEY HAVE LEARNED DURING THE RLA SERIES

IDENTIFY A COMMUNITY-LEVEL CHANGE WITH A SHORT-TERM IMPACT THAT INTERESTS THEM

The group elected to plant 10 fruit-bearing trees across Yuma County to support food security for families. As of September 2024, the Yuma SNAP-Ed team, together with the Healthy Eating Active Living coalition, continued to provide backbone support for the project, which had three RLA graduates still participating.

The AZ Health Zone State Evaluation Team conducted pre, post, and eight-month follow-up surveys with RLA participants to capture their program experiences and recommendations. Knowledge increased in three areas (figure, right). Three knowledge items were unchanged: community strengths and weaknesses, how to support one's personal or family health, and how to access resources to improve the participants' communities. A focus group was also conducted eight months after the series with RLA graduates who were still engaged in the community improvement project. This enabled the exploration of longer-term impacts of participation and captured perspectives on project implementation.

Of the seven knowledge items assessed, participants (n=8) reported increases in their knowledge of:

✓ The roles different community stakeholders play (non-significant but with a large effect, d=0.76)

✓ How to find common ground with stakeholders (significant at $p \leq 0.05$ with a large effect, d=1.15)

✓ How to plan a project and see it through (non-significant but with a large effect, d=0.89)

These results suggest increased self-efficacy to make community changes [ST6a].

Focus group participants (n=3) shared their most IMPACTFUL LEARNINGS and RECOMMENDATIONS:

NEW LEADERSHIP & FACILITATION SKILLS [ST6]

"I love the tangible activities that they gave us, and I used them in some of the other coalitions or task forces that I'm running because it was so easy to do them, so easy to build consensus. So, I think the activities that they gave us and keeping it all in a folder…we could refer to them, [which] was helpful."

ENSURING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE PROJECT

"If there's any way that [the project] can be constantly reiterated throughout all [classes], I think that will help keep that momentum, that accountability, that engagement."

"I noticed a decline in participants after we were done with the sessions and started implementing the project."

DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY NETWORK

"It's been a great social, collaborative, business network that we've generated within [our group]. But also, a great sounding board for how we can enhance whatever ideas do come through within our work scope or our personal desires or goals…it's been really great to develop that."

ADDRESSING THE PROJECT'S TIME COMMITMENT

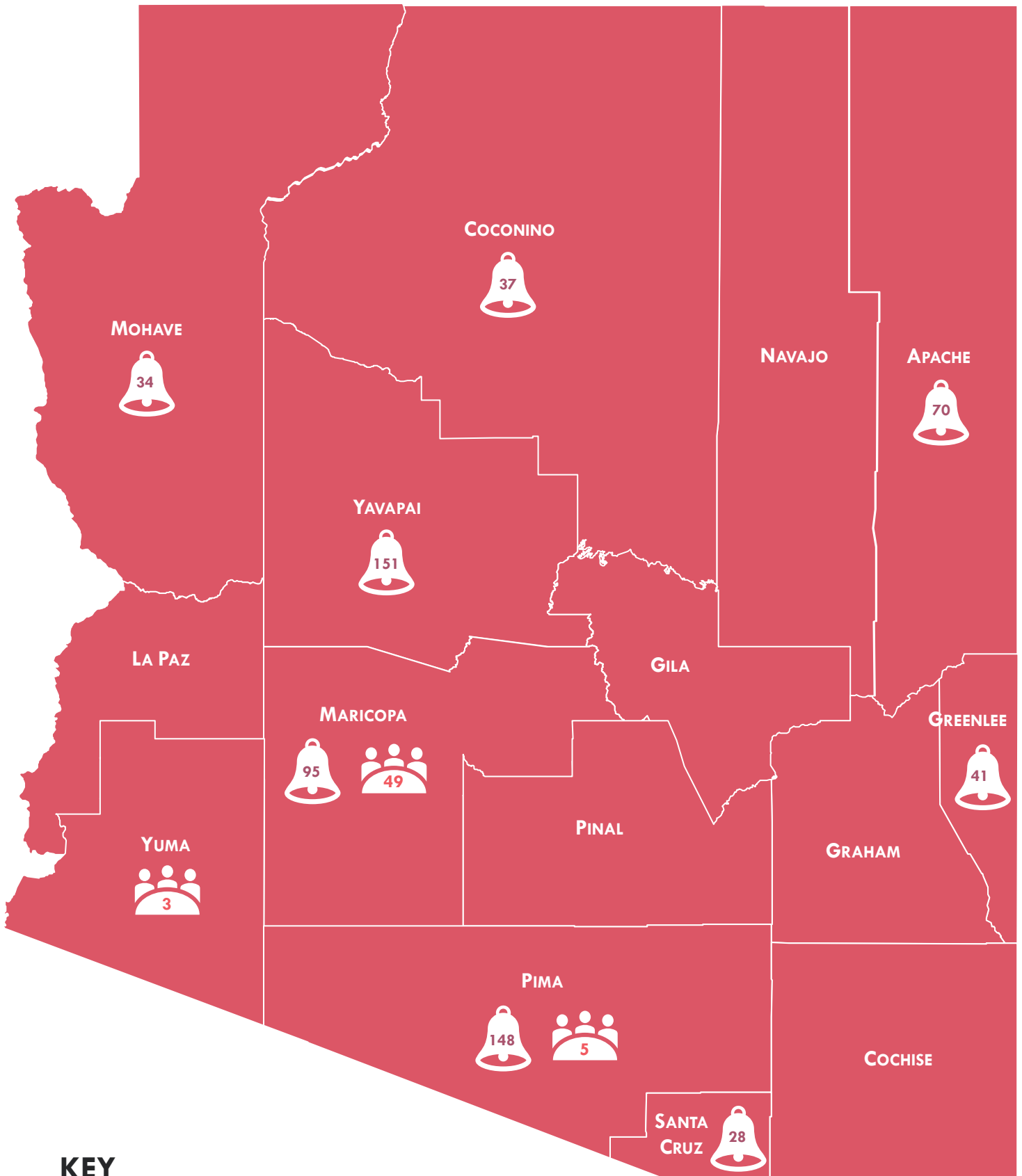"I don't think we realized that this was going to be work that was going to continue after the last sessions."

"[The project] can't just rely on us…the Health Department could take more of a lead, and then we could just follow or give ideas because we're not being paid for this opportunity."

Yuma SNAP-Ed Sustains the RLA's Successes

The second Yuma RLA series kicked off in October 2024 with revisions based on lessons learned and participant feedback. Modifications include updates to the content and a welcome letter that reiterates the project's time commitment after the sessions, as well as a clarification that the project will be supported but not led by the Yuma team.

Beyond local work, the Yuma team will share their RLA experiences during a future AZ Health Zone Managers' Committee with other LIAs who may be interested in implementing an RLA series in their counties.

COCONINO 🔔 37

MOHAVE 🔔 34

NAVAJO

APACHE 🔔 70

YAVAPAI 🔔 151

LA PAZ

GILA

GREENLEE 🔔 41

MARICOPA 🔔 95 👥 49

PINAL

GRAHAM

YUMA 👥 3

PIMA 🔔 148 👥 5

COCHISE

SANTA CRUZ 🔔 28

👥 7

KEY

👥 = # matched *Around the Table* surveys during the period analyzed

🔔 = # *Kids' Activity & Nutrition Questionnaires* during the period analyzed

Individual Focus

AZ Health Zone Youth & Adult Individual Focus

Multilevel interventions were assessed among school-aged youth participating in AZ Health Zone programs through schools and other youth-based systems

Direct Education (DE) outcomes were assessed for adults who attended an evidence-based series of classes in a group setting

Individual Level Evaluation

Youth. The AZ Health Zone assessed *Healthy Eating* [ST1, MT1] and *Physical Activity and Reduced Sedentary Behavior* [ST3, MT3] using the AZ Health Zone Kids' Activity and Nutrition Questionnaire (KAN-Q). The KAN-Q was administered once in Spring 2024 for a snapshot in time of students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. This also informed FY23-24 comparisons. We set the confidence level for this evaluation at 99% ($p \leq 0.01$) due to the large sample size (n=604).

Adults. We used the *Around the Table Nourishing Families* survey to assess changes in adults' *Healthy Eating* [MT1] and *Food Resource Management* [MT2] behaviors, as well as some in-home *Nutrition Supports* [MT5]. The survey was delivered before and after the *Around the Table* series—a six-workshop, trauma-informed curriculum. Our confidence level for this evaluation was set at 90% ($p \leq 0.10$) due to the modest sample size for matched pre-post surveys (n=64).

Multilevel Interventions in Schools

Who Took the KAN-Q? In Spring FY24, three Local Implementing Agencies (LIAs) in eight counties administered the KAN-Q in schools where they supported policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) or multilevel (DE + PSE) interventions. Just over 600 students completed the KAN-Q (**Figure 20**). Not all respondents answered every survey question.

Student Comprehension. We also conducted cognitive interviews with 4th-7th grade students to offer insight into students' comprehension of the KAN-Q items. Interview results led the SET to exclude whole grains and milk data in this year's cross-sectional analysis (next page).
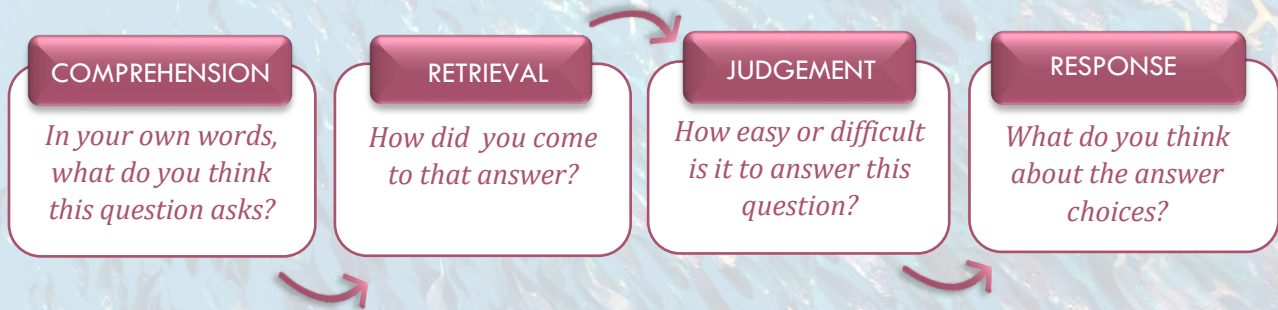
20. Of all students who completed the KAN-Q (n=604), most were in the 4th grade. More girls participated, though 4% of students did not provide their gender.

5th grade 21%
6th grade 13%
7th grade 6%
8th grade 5%
4th grade 55%

Boys 45%
Girls 51%
No Response 4%
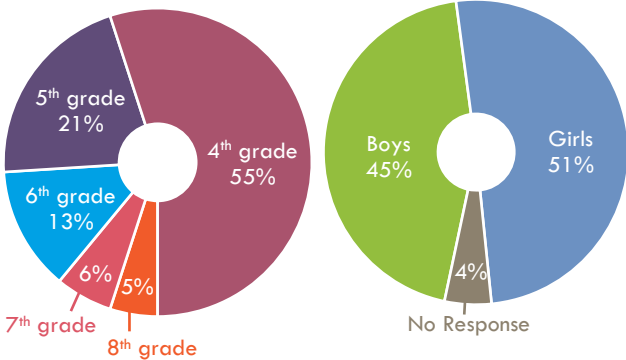
Diving Deeper with Students:

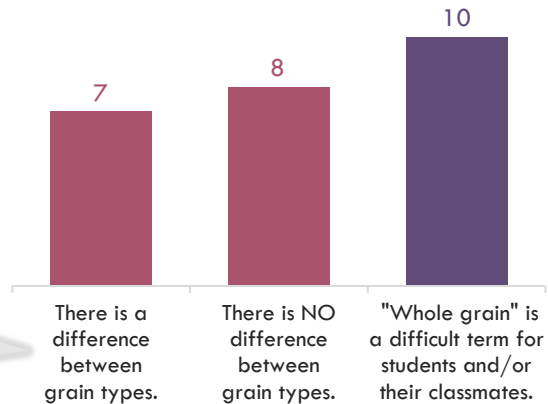## What Emerged from the KAN-Q Cognitive Interviews?

In FY24, the SET conducted cognitive interviews to evaluate the extent to which students understood the KAN-Q items. We interviewed 18 students in the 4th-7th grades across three counties. The four cognitive stages involved in answering survey questions were used to guide our conversations with students:

COMPREHENSION	RETRIEVAL	JUDGEMENT	RESPONSE
In your own words, what do you think this question asks?	*How did you come to that answer?*	*How easy or difficult is it to answer this question?*	*What do you think about the answer choices?*

***Whole vs Refined Grains.* Figure 21** shows students' responses to three grain-related questions about the KAN-Q's whole and refined grain items. Two students identified whole grains as having more benefits than white grains (e.g., more protein), with many basing their distinctions on past meal experiences.

> "The difference is that this is white macaroni, and this is grain**...dark macaroni goes in soup and stuff like that. Macaroni, you just eat plain** with cheese and stuff."

21. Many students did not distinguish between grain types and found whole grain-related questions difficult to understand (n=15).

There is a difference between grain types.	There is NO difference between grain types.	"Whole grain" is a difficult term for students and/or their classmates.
7	8	10

Milk Types. We asked students two questions about these KAN-Q milk items: what type of milk they drink most of the time, and their attitude towards drinking milk low in fat. Seven of eight students (88%) found these milk-related questions challenging due to a lack of understanding the different types of milk. This was reinforced by students noting that they typically drink the milk provided to them at school and/or that they did not know what type of milk they drink.

> "[This question was] pretty difficult. **It's because I know the color of the cap, but I don't know what kind of milk it is.**"

> "It took a little more thinking about because I didn't know what I drink. Because **I go to school every day, so I just said the school milk.** So fat free."

Recall. Students also expressed difficulty in recalling food items or beverages consumed "yesterday" and physical activity from "last week." This challenge was evident when students took long pauses to answer these items, relied on photos in the questionnaire to guide their responses, and noted recall as the most challenging part of answering these items.

Interpretation of "Times Yesterday." Many KAN-Q behavior items ask about "times [eaten or drank] yesterday." In past reports, the SET has noted challenges in our understanding of whether "times yesterday" acted as a proxy for servings. Results from the cognitive interviews suggest that students' interpretations of "times yesterday" varies widely (**Figure 22**).

22. Due to varying interpretations between students, "times yesterday" may not be an accurate proxy for "servings yesterday."

"Actually, I'll pick 6 times yesterday because in all I drank 2 water bottles and 4 cups of water yesterday."

Number of water bottles, cups, or gulps.

Mealtimes or different points of the day

"I had a lot of fruit yesterday—purple grapes, blueberries, and strawberries for breakfast. Later that night, I had some more grapes and blueberries. Yes, I ate fruit 2 times yesterday."

"I had bread yesterday. I had it [twice]. That was lunch and dinner. And a corndog for lunch. So [I had grains] 3 times."

Total number of food items

Types of food items

"The fruit that I'm counting when I say 3 times is an apple, oranges, and grapes."

Next Steps. Results from the cognitve interviews suggest that re-envisioning the KAN-Q may be necessary. The SET will explore this opportunity in the upcoming year. As the AZ Health Zone program continues to evolve, a revamped youth behavior evaluation can consider these key areas:

Evaluating the relevance of existing youth behavior assessments in capturing the complexities of student behaviors.

Identifying ways to collect accurate student data with direct conceptual ties to PSE, DE, and/or multi-level interventions.

Enhancing data collection methods to account for students' personal, dietary, and cultural preferences or restrictions.
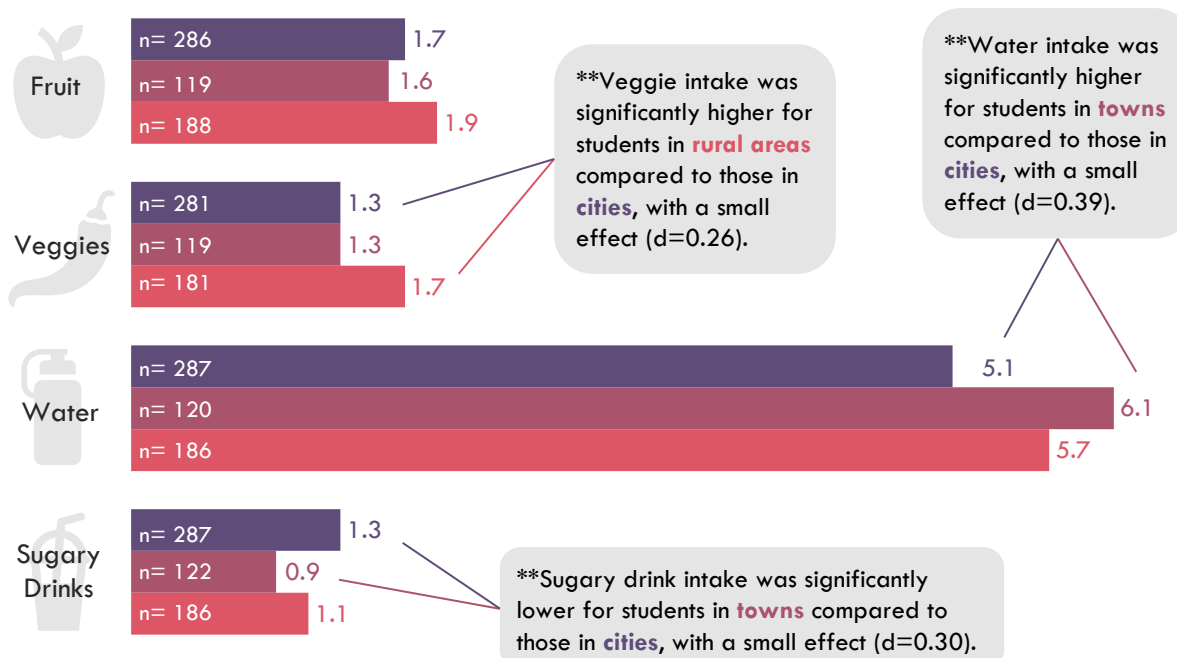
Knowledge, Attitudes, & Behavior. Students'
knowledge of the USDA Dietary Guidelines,
attitudes toward physical activity and MyPlate
food categories, consumption of MyPlate food
and beverage groups "yesterday," and total
bouts of physical activity "last week" were
mostly consistent with our FY23 findings. This
year, we saw a minor increase in reported water
intake (5.5, up from 5.0 "times yesterday") and
the percent of students who knew the physical
activity guidelines (48%, up from 44%) [ST3].
The percent of students who correctly
identified the fruit and vegetable guidelines
decreased (44%, down from 47%) [ST1g.h].

Exploring KAN-Q Findings by Geography. We
compared KAN-Q results across three groups:
students residing in cities, towns, and more
rural areas. No between-group differences
were found in nutrition or physical activity
attitudes. However, a notable trend emerged

in nutrition and activity behaviors: Students in
towns and rural areas reported more health-
supporting behaviors compared to their city-
based peers, with some differences found to be
statistically significant (**Figures 23-25**) .

Similar trends were observed in the previous
reporting period and may reflect distinct
characteristics of students from different
geographic areas in Arizona. For example, the
agricultural lifestyles more prevalent in rural
Arizona may impact students' food or activity
preferences. City-based students' behaviors
may be shaped by their increased exposure to
urban infrastructure, food marketing, and/or
convenience foods. Geographical differences
in local food and physical activity norms may
also influence student health outcomes.
Additional research from the SET may be
explored in future reporting.

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23. Compared to youth in CITIES, youth in TOWNS and RURAL AREAS had higher mean vegetable [MT1$_m$] and water [MT1$_g$] intake and lower mean sugary drink intake [MT1$_h$]. Intake was self-reported as "times yesterday."
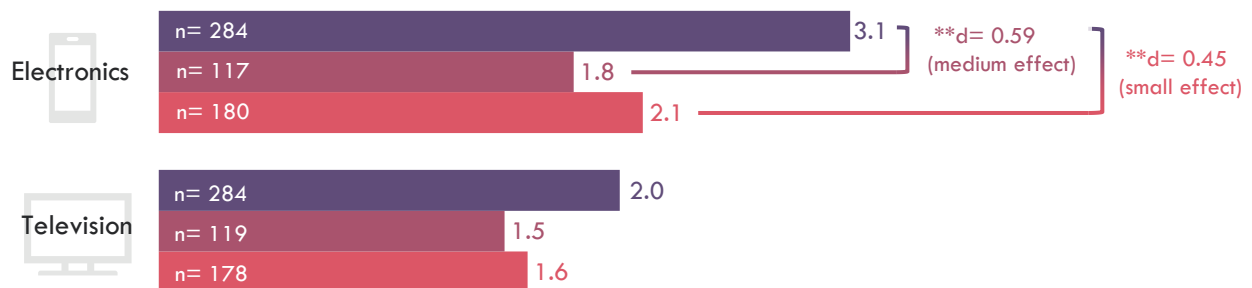

Fruit
- n= 286 → 1.7
- n= 119 → 1.6
- n= 188 → 1.9

Veggies
- n= 281 → 1.3
- n= 119 → 1.3
- n= 181 → 1.7

Water
- n= 287 → 5.1
- n= 120 → 6.1
- n= 186 → 5.7

Sugary Drinks
- n= 287 → 1.3
- n= 122 → 0.9
- n= 186 → 1.1

Veggie intake was significantly higher for students in **rural areas compared to those in **cities**, with a small effect (d=0.26).

Water intake was significantly higher for students in **towns compared to those in **cities**, with a small effect (d=0.39).

Sugary drink intake was significantly lower for students in **towns compared to those in **cities**, with a small effect (d=0.30).

**p≤ 0.01

24. Youth in RURAL AREAS reported the highest average number of times active last week compared to youth in a CITY or TOWN.

Rural (n=191) 🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃 10.5 times active

Town (n=122) 🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃 10.1 times active

City (n=291) 🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃 9.6 times active

---

25. Youth in CITIES reported more time sedentary [MT3$_{g,h}$] than youth in TOWNS and RURAL AREAS. Sedentary time was reported as "hours spent yesterday."

Electronics
- n= 284 — 3.1
- n= 117 — 1.8
- n= 180 — 2.1

**d= 0.59 (medium effect)

**d= 0.45 (small effect)

Television
- n= 284 — 2.0
- n= 119 — 1.5
- n= 178 — 1.6

**p≤ 0.01

How Did School-Level PSEs Relate to KAN-Q Outcomes? In FY24, we sought to understand whether KAN-Q outcomes varied among schools participating in one or both of these school-based PSE interventions: school gardens and the Smarter Lunchroom Movement (SLM) (see the **Childhood: School Systems** chapter).

School Gardens. To understand possible links between school gardens and KAN-Q results, we compared students' self-reported attitudes and behaviors in schools with (n=363) and without (n=241) a garden. Youth attitudes were similar for both groups. For eating behaviors, youth in schools *with* a garden reported consuming less fruit (1.6 vs 1.9; non-significant; d=0.20), vegetables (1.3 vs 1.6; p≤0.01; d=0.26), and protein (0.6 vs 0.9; p≤0.01; d=0.25), all with small effects.

While a positive association between fruit and vegetable consumption and the presence of school garden may be expected, the extent to which assessed students in this analysis were directly engaged with the school garden was unknown. Moreover, no data were available

regarding the school gardens' condition, stage of development (ex., new, dormant, active), or integration into the school's everyday culture and function. The SET's new school garden evaluation tool, which will be used by LIAs in FY25, will collect this information and may therefore help to illuminate the relationship between SNAP-Ed garden interventions and youth behaviors.

SLM Participation. We also explored differences between attitudes and behaviors for students in non-SLM schools (n= 507) and those in schools that completed an SLM Scorecard (n=97). No statistically significant between-group differences were found in students' attitudes or self-reported behaviors. These results partly contrast [FY22 findings](), where between-group differences for water/sugary beverage consumption and physical activity bouts were found.

It is important to note that SLM Scorecard *completion* does not reflect actual PSE changes made to school cafeteria settings; there was an insufficient sample size to complete such an analysis. In response, the SET plans to explore future opportunities to assess students' eating behaviors tied more directly to PSE changes.

Success Story:

Concerted Efforts to Preserve Continuity During Garden Relocation

"Students routinely participate in the lessons, and extra activities are sometimes added to the lessons to support what the students are learning during their regular class time. The **teachers at Valentine have also started to incorporate nutrition and gardening into their regular curriculum;** [they] use food items and produce grown in the garden as examples during their math and science lessons."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Mohave

In Mohave County, SNAP-Ed multilevel support for the school garden and K-8 nutrition education has led to the integration of nutrition and gardening into classroom curriculum and the broader school culture.

Faced with the challenge of an upcoming construction project that would temporarily relocate the school and its existing garden, the school prioritized continuity of the garden program. Thus, the decision was made to plant container gardens for each classroom.

AZ Health Zone staff facilitated student engagement sessions with each classroom, collaborating with students to take part in the planning process for their gardens. The result was a diverse range of projects tailored to each grade level's interests and academic focus.

Adult Direct Education: *Around the Table* Findings

Reach. This year, LIAs in four counties collected 64 matched pre-post surveys—the highest number ever submitted for this series. Most came from the UA Cooperative Extension, Maricopa (77%) and were completed in Spanish (75%). As in prior years, the vast majority of respondents were female, but other demographics varied from FY23 (**Figure 26**). About a third of the respondents (31%) reported receiving SNAP benefits, similar to the proportions in FY21 and FY22.

26. Compared to the *Around the Table* FY23 respondents (n=38), a larger proportion of FY24 respondents (n=64) were aged 30-49, Hispanic, and had children at home.
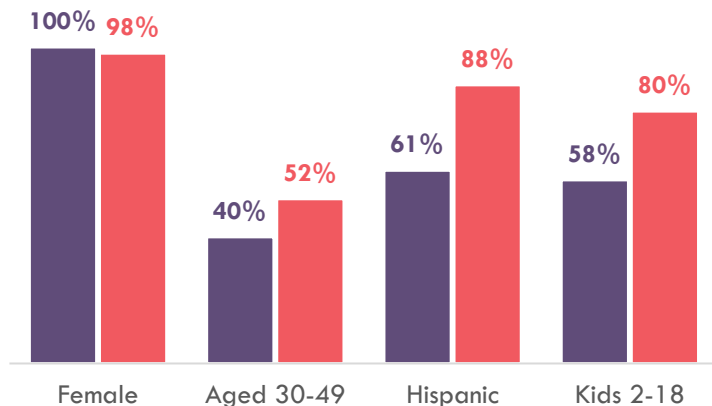
Several LIAs Reached Adults with Community-Engaged & Trauma-Informed DE

The UA Cooperative Extension, Santa Cruz used their school partner's newsletter to promote Around the Table *classes in English and Spanish.*

The UA Cooperative Extension Maricopa, Pima, and Santa Cruz programs used mid-year SARNs to highlight their community-engaged strategies for planning and implementing *Around the Table* and other adult DE. They asked residents about their topical interests and needs during in-person sessions, and they discussed with partners and families the reasoning behind using trauma-informed curricula. The UA Maricopa also administered a dot survey for community members to rate preferred topics, which informed their choice of DE classes.

"The [UA Cooperative Extension, Pima] includes **trauma aware approaches from the Language of Health Style Guide** using 'class norms' at the beginning of each lesson. These class norms include:

- All foods fit.
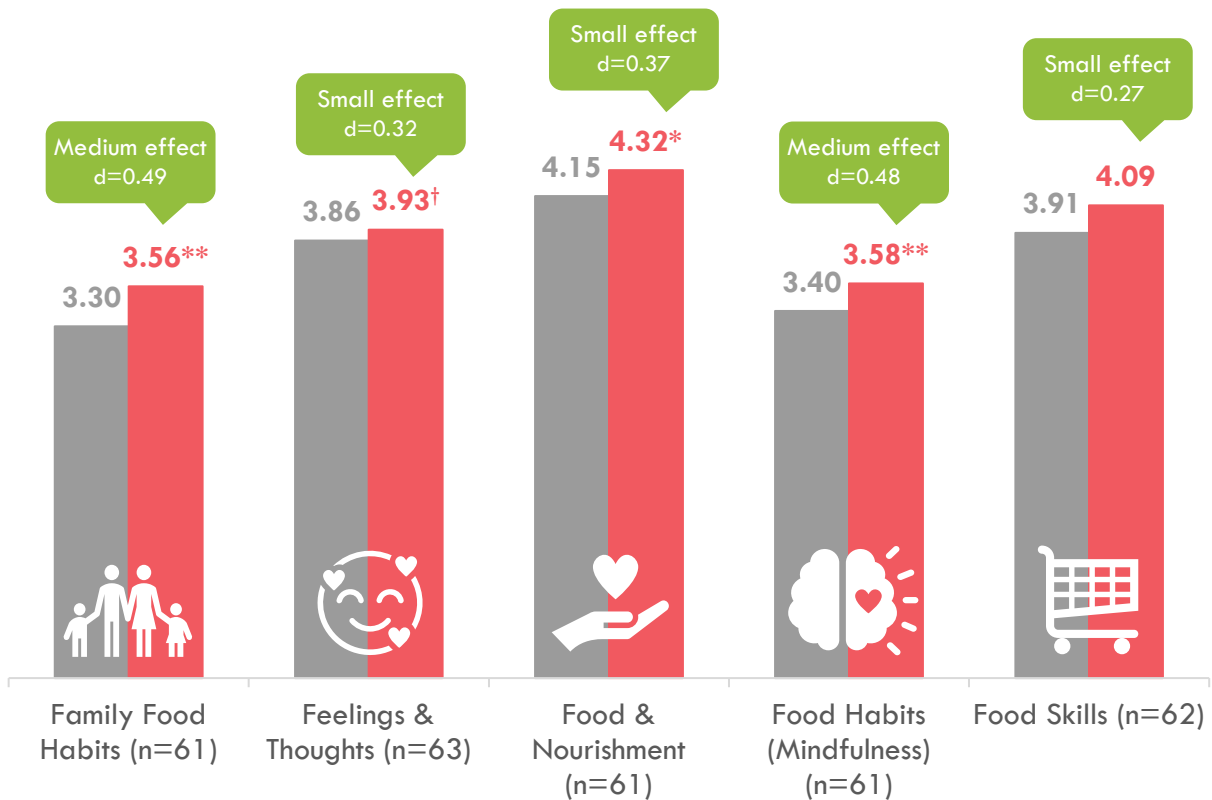- There are no good or bad foods.
- Food is meant to be enjoyed."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Pima

Behavior Change. The *Around the Table* survey included six sections, five of which assessed short-term readiness and capacity for changing dietary behaviors [ST1-2]. In FY24, respondents reported improvements to all five of these short-term outcomes after completing the *Around the Table* classes (**Figure 27**).

Each of the five sections included 4-12 unique items. Item improvements that drove the **Figure 27** section increases are shown in **Figure 28** (next page). These included in-home "systems" changes to the foods and beverages served [MT5$_c$], internal shifts around food and mood, and behavioral changes to respondents' Food Skills [ST2$_{b.m}$].

A sixth section, Personal Nutrition Habits, measured self-reported fruit, vegetable, grain, water, and sugary beverage intake. As in FY23, there were no statistically significant changes to these behaviors. There was weak evidence (i.e., non-significant, with a small effect size) that vegetable consumption [MT1$_m$] increased—a potentially positive result. However, there was also weak evidence that sugary drink intake [MT1$_h$] increased, a potentially negative finding. Given that behavior change takes time and is usually preceded by maintaining changes to short-term indicators, caution is warranted in interpreting results for these medium-term indicators after a single DE series.

27. Mean scores for these *Around the Table* survey sections increased from PRE to POST, with small to medium effects. Scores ranged from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).


Medium effect d=0.49 — Family Food Habits (n=61): 3.30, 3.56**

Small effect d=0.32 — Feelings & Thoughts (n=63): 3.86, 3.93†

Small effect d=0.37 — Food & Nourishment (n=61): 4.15, 4.32*

Medium effect d=0.48 — Food Habits (Mindfulness) (n=61): 3.40, 3.58**

Small effect d=0.27 — Food Skills (n=62): 3.91, 4.09

†p≤0.10, *p≤0.05, **p≤0.01

28. Of the 43 *Around the Table* survey items, 12 showed statistically significant pre-post improvements, all with small to medium effects.
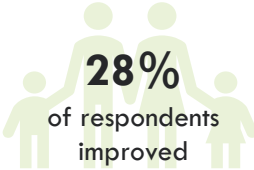
FAMILY FOOD HABITS
How often is green salad served [MT5$_c$]?

36%
of respondents improved
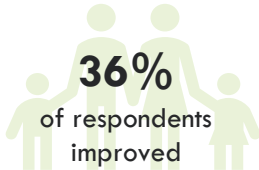
FAMILY FOOD HABITS
How often are sugary drinks served [MT5$_c$]?

35%
of respondents improved
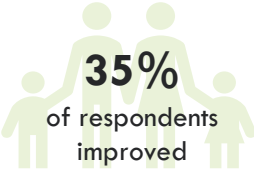
FAMILY FOOD HABITS
My children are willing to eat vegetables [ST1$_b$].

28%
of respondents improved

FEELINGS & THOUGHTS
I've been feeling relaxed.

40%
of respondents improved

FEELINGS & THOUGHTS
I've been feeling confident.

35%
of respondents improved

FEELINGS & THOUGHTS
I've been feeling cheerful.

39%
of respondents improved

FOOD & NOURISHMENT
Eating foods good for my body brings me comfort.

30%
of respondents improved
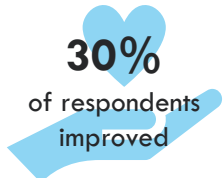
FOOD HABITS (MINDFULNESS)
I notice subtle flavors in the food I eat.

44%
of respondents improved
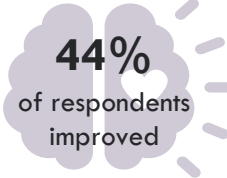
FOOD SKILLS
I balance meals based on nutrition advice.

38%
of respondents improved
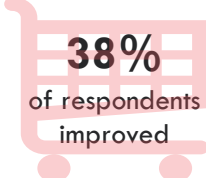
FOOD SKILLS
I read the nutrition information on food labels [ST2$_b$].

32%
of respondents improved
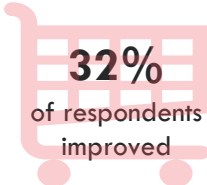
FOOD SKILLS
I prepare a healthy meal with only a few ingredients [ST2$_m$].

32%
of respondents improved
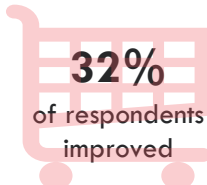
FOOD SKILLS
I keep basic items on hand for preparing meals.

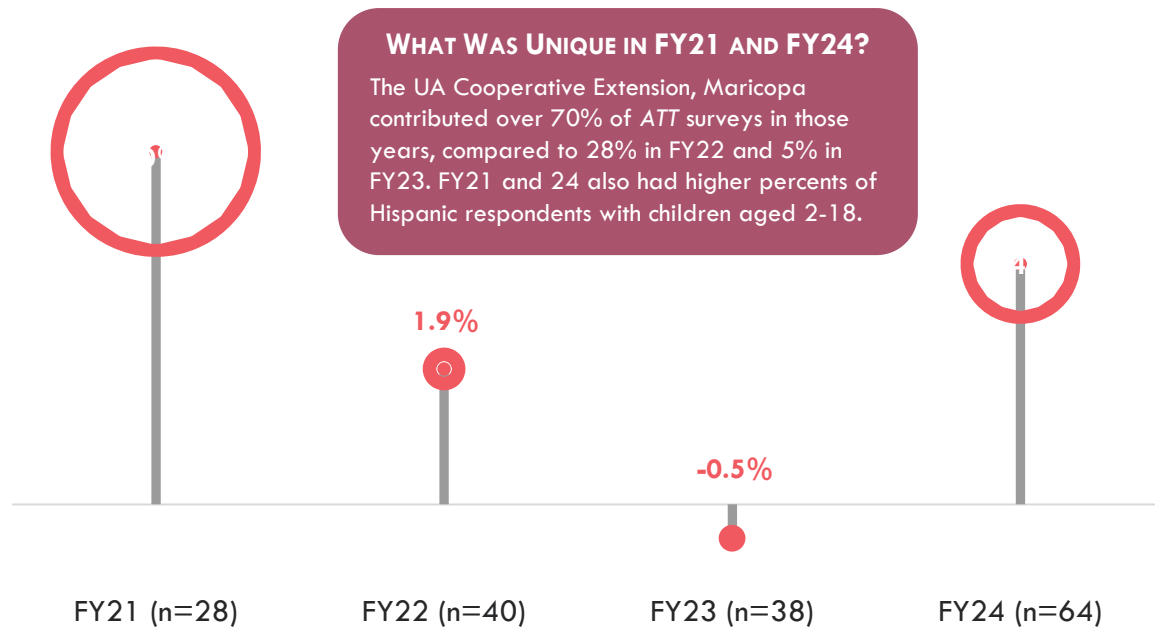**31%**
of respondents improved
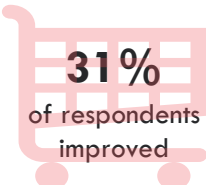
Secondary analyses uncovered two additional insights related to Personal Nutrition Habits. First, just one between-groups difference was found for English versus Spanish survey takers: The English group started with lower mean daily fruit intake and improved significantly (0.88 to 1.31, p≤0.05, d=0.75, large effect), whereas the Spanish group started with higher mean daily fruit intake and had a non-significant *decrease* at post (1.54 to 1.33, d=0.27, small effect). This shows that the two groups became more similar with respect to fruit consumption after the *Around the Table* series.

Next, there was also a single between-groups difference for respondents with and without kids in the home. Those without kids were significantly different than those with kids when it came to how much they reduced their sugary drink intake in the past week (p≤0.05, d=0.55, medium effect): While those with *no* kids reduced their mean sugary drink intake (1.20 to 1.08), those *with* kids increased their intake (0.76 to 0.94). Even so, respondents with kids had lower overall sugary drink consumption at pre *and* post, which again shows that the two groups grew more similar over time.

Patterns Across Years. Mean pre and post scores for the five sections assessing short-term outcomes have followed the same general pattern since FY21: The Food & Nourishment section has been rated consistently high, while Food Habits (Mindfulness) has been rated consistently low. Family Food Habits have also scored relatively low across all years except FY23. In terms of pre-post change, the total mean scores for all five sections increased in three of the past four years (**Figure 29**). Two years, FY21 and FY24, have seen the most notable increases.

29. Mean total *Around the Table* scores for short-term outcomes increased the most in FY21 and FY24. The percents below show the percent changes in mean total scores for the five survey sections that used a 1-5 rating scale. Circle sizes represent the Cohen's d effect sizes.

WHAT WAS UNIQUE IN FY21 AND FY24?
The UA Cooperative Extension, Maricopa contributed over 70% of *ATT* surveys in those years, compared to 28% in FY22 and 5% in FY23. FY21 and 24 also had higher percents of Hispanic respondents with children aged 2-18.

1.9%

-0.5%

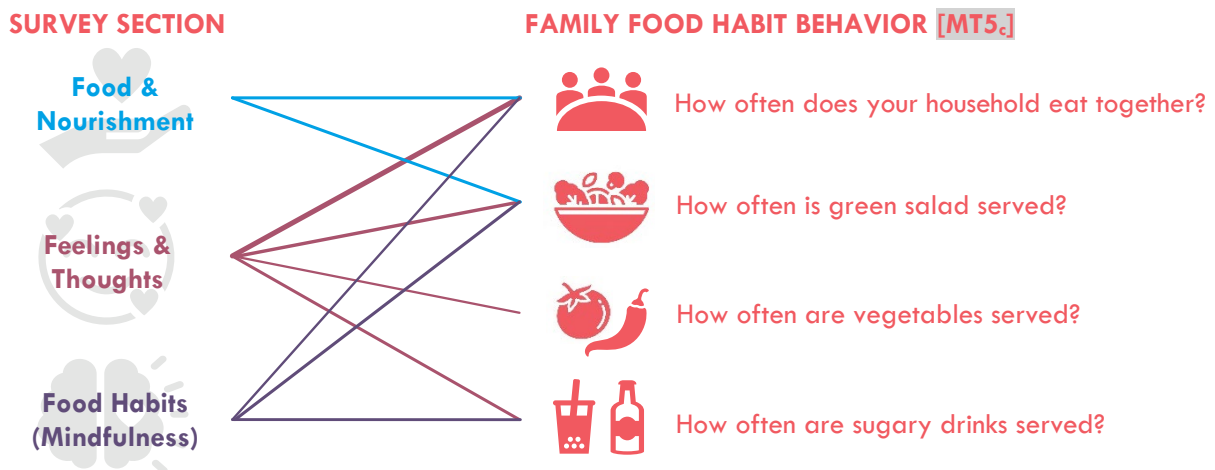| FY21 (n=28) | FY22 (n=40) | FY23 (n=38) | FY24 (n=64) |

*p≤0.05, ***p≤0.001

Other Insights into Behavior Change. We also explored the trauma-informed question: *How do internal conditions like thoughts, feelings, and values relate to external behaviors?* We looked at the relationships between the more self-reflective *Around the Table* survey sections and the sections that measured external, self-reported behaviors.

We found statistically significant links between Feelings & Thoughts and all four Family Food Habit behaviors at pre and post. Food Habits (Mindfulness) and Food & Nourishment (i.e., values and emotions associated with food) were significantly correlated with some but not all Family Food Habit behaviors (**Figure 30**).

We also found significant associations between Food Habits (Mindfulness) and three Personal Nutrition Habits—whole grain consumption, vegetable intake, and sugary beverage decline. Correlations between Personal Nutrition Habits and Feelings & Thoughts, and between Personal Nutrition Habits and Food & Nourishment, were detected at pre but not post.

Together, these findings suggest that addressing individuals' internal state may have a positive influence on family-centered nutrition behaviors. Mindfulness interventions around eating may also help to promote some individual-level behavior change.

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30. Scores for the three internally-focused *Around the Table* **survey sections were significantly correlated with scores for various Family Food Habits.** The lines below illustrate which sections were correlated with which behavior items, and their thickness represents the strength of the association.

SURVEY SECTION

Food & Nourishment

Feelings & Thoughts

Food Habits (Mindfulness)

FAMILY FOOD HABIT BEHAVIOR [MT5c]

How often does your household eat together?

How often is green salad served?

How often are vegetables served?

How often are sugary drinks served?

Success Story

The UA Cooperative Extension, Maricopa shared how the *Around the Table* adult series spurred broader PSE work in two communities. In Maryvale, participants became more interested in their elementary school's garden. In South Phoenix, class participants shared challenges around accessing preferred produce, resulting in new LIA efforts to promote fruit and vegetable access.

"The class participants and [site] coordinator thought SNAP benefits could only be used at grocery stores. [In response, we began to] compile a list of **local sites with access to free-and-reduced-cost fruits and vegetables**...The coordinator shared how thankful participants' families were to have this information!"

-UA Cooperative Extension, Maricopa

Coming Together for Changemaking:
Relationships in Two Counties Honor Tribal Traditions

Honoring Tradition through Gardening, Family, and Culture

This year, the UA Cooperative Extension, Pima worked hand-in-hand with the Pascua Yaqui Head Start in Southern Arizona to nurture something deeper than a garden: a sense of cultural identity, tradition, and community. Through professional development, family engagement, and a shared commitment to growing traditional foods, this partnership supported both food security and reconnection to ancestral knowledge.

At the heart of this work was the traditional "milpa" garden, a culturally significant way of growing food for the Pascua Yaqui Tribe. Local Implementing Agency (LIA) staff led a train-the-trainer effort, working with adults to expand the garden and ensure its teachings were passed down.

This wasn't just about planting seeds; it was about planting knowledge. By expanding the milpa garden, participants created more space to grow foods that carry cultural significance, promote food sovereignty, educate children, and bring families together in the process.

"As part of the garden activities for the children, **the practice of speaking in the tribe's language was incorporated into the garden** and the children recited, 'Si-tutu uli-Taewai' ('What a beautiful day') as they entered the garden."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Pima

The garden became a living classroom, where children played an active role.

The impact of this work was also shared beyond the community, as LIA staff and the Pascua Yaqui Head Start teamed up to present at the AZ Health Zone's annual conference. Their session, "Creating a Mindful Garden while Promoting Yaqui Culture and Tradition," served as an inspiration for others looking to blend cultural practices with health education. By showcasing how the milpa garden was cultivated not only with plants but with mindfulness and tradition, they shared the importance of grounding health initiatives in the unique strengths of each community members' perspectives to guide decision making.

51

LIA staff involvement has extended even further through their participation in the Good Health in Indian Country/ Yoemtumame Coalition, where the focus is on uplifting cultural practices to combat modern health challenges and support maternal and child health.

Thus together, LIA staff and the Pascua Yaqui Community continue to support efforts that center on the tribe's long-held values and rich cultural practices, working toward a future where health and tradition mutually thrive.

> "**The garden's growth and sustainability has been vast and a model for other programs** who have asked about visiting the site. This creates opportunities for a greater awareness of the Pascua Yaqui culture."
>
> -UA Cooperative Extension, Pima

Nourishing Tradition by Celebrating Food, Family, and Culture

In northern Arizona, the *Around the Table (ATT)* nutrition series continued to foster spaces where participants felt encouraged to share their cultural beliefs and practices—a testament to the Coconino County Health Department (CCHHS)'s commitment to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment. In FY24, this trauma-informed nutrition education series served as a bridge between modern practices and traditional knowledge.

The LIA facilitated an *ATT* series for parents in the Family and Child Education (FACE) Program, which included 45 minutes of bookwork balanced with mindfulness exercises and reflective conversations. Participants were encouraged to select and prepare new recipes each week and later shared how they adapted the ingredients.

> "It is beautiful to see how **participants become comfortable sharing cultural beliefs and practices during the** *Around the Table* **nutrition series...**It's not often that CCHHS hears directly from participants about the effects that the classes provided."
>
> -Coconino County Health & Human Services

A notable cultural exchange occurred during the final class, when participants chose to teach the CCHHS staff how to make Navajo fry bread. They collaboratively agreed to use whole wheat flour, an adaptation of the traditional recipe, which was well-received, especially when paired with a vegetable topping that had become a class favorite.

Prior to this, LIA staff had attended the AZ Health Zone's professional development opportunities about incorporating trauma-informed approaches into the *ATT* series. This helped them to establish a platform for *ATT* participants to share and learn, creating a culturally responsive and inclusive space that honors tradition while promoting health and wellness. The comfort participants showed when sharing their stories and experiences reflected the LIA's trust-building efforts and highlighted the importance of culturally meaningful approaches.

AZ HEALTH ZONE

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES
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& Wellness

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