



COLORADO
Department of Education

Menstrual Hygiene Accessibility Grant Program

2022 – 2023 Academic Year

Submitted to:

Colorado Senate Education Committee
Colorado House Education Committee

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Executive Summary

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

Description of the Challenge

Period poverty and barriers to menstrual equity affect Colorado students, and some students miss class time or are absent from school because they do not have access to period products. School is an important access point for period products.

Description of the Intervention

During the 2022 – 2023 academic year, the Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility Grant Program provided 32 local educational providers that each enroll 50% or more students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch with \$1,000 to \$4,200 to increase access to free menstrual hygiene products in gender-neutral spaces in schools. The Colorado Department of Education administered the grant program.

Program Outcomes

A total of \$99,700 was awarded, and \$91,310.05 was spent. The total amount of money spent on the acquisition and distribution of menstrual hygiene products in 2022 – 2023 was \$62,909.53, and the total amount of money spent on the installation and maintenance of a dispensing machine or disposal receptacles for menstrual hygiene products was \$24,200.52. An additional \$4,200 was spent but has not been categorized. \$8,389.95 was unspent.

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

Conclusion

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



Introduction

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

Description of the Challenge

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

Period Poverty and Menstrual Equity

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

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

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

School as an Important Access Point

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

Description of the Intervention

The Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility Grant Program was created by S.B. 21-255, “Free Menstrual Hygiene Products to Students,” and signed into law on July 6, 2021. During the 2022 – 2023 academic year, the program provided 32 local educational providers that enroll 50% or more students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch with \$1,000 to \$4,200 each to increase access to free menstrual hygiene products in gender-neutral spaces in schools.



Grant Recipients

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

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

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

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

Table 2: Number of funding recipients by Colorado region.

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

Since its inception in 2021, the Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility program has reached a total of 62 unique LEPs. Table 3 shows the numbers of new and previous funding recipients by academic year.

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

Academic Year	Number of newly funded recipients	Number of previously funded recipients
2021 – 2022	40	0
2022 – 2023	22	10

Grant Administration

Members of the Colorado Department of Education School Health Services Office, Grants Program Administration, and School Finance Division worked together to administer the program and provide support to



program participants. The program application period occurred in October 2022, and successful applicants were notified in November 2022. The successful applicants had through June 2023, approximately seven months, to purchase menstrual hygiene products and purchase and install product dispensing machines and product disposal receptacles and receptacle liners. Program updates were provided as needed, and an optional program survey was administered in August 2023 to gain program feedback. The School Health Services Office maintained the program webpage and fact sheet with important program information.

Program Outcomes

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

Table 4: Amount spent by category.

Category	Total amount spent
Menstrual hygiene products	\$62,909.53
Installation/maintenance of machines and disposal receptacles	\$24,200.52
Amount spent but not yet categorized	\$4,200
	\$ 91,310.05

An additional \$4,200 was spent on allowable items; however, CDE cannot categorize that \$4,200 due to insufficient information. CDE will continue to contact participants to obtain the information needed. The amount unspent by program participants was \$8,389.95.

Expected Program Outcomes

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

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



Program Survey Results

In August 2023, an optional survey was administered to program participants. Of 32 program participants, 28 responded. Survey respondents reported that they are likely to reapply for grant funding when product stock is depleted, and that they experienced minimal challenges with the grant. Challenges experienced included purchasing and receiving, an instance of product misuse, and an instance of wanting more time in the academic year to purchase and provide supplies.

Respondents confirmed that the number of gender-neutral spaces where students can dispose of, and access free menstrual hygiene products has increased. Additionally, respondents offered the following comments:

Many low-income students rely on these products to be provided to them by the school as their families do not have the financial capacity to purchase the needed hygiene products.

We have had multiple students who were not able to get menstrual supplies while at school before. We now have supplies in classrooms, bathrooms, and health offices that students can get to and feel comfortable asking a variety of people for supplies.

Product disappears! Of course, nobody likes to talk about needing menstrual hygiene products so I wasn't sure how much items would be used but the products definitely disappear quickly. Thank you for allowing us to offer menstrual hygiene products free to students!!

Students now have access to these supplies in multiple places in our buildings due to this grant and no longer have to go to the office for these items.

Conclusion

Menstrual equity and period poverty are challenges for Colorado students that impact their time in class. In the 2022 – 2023 academic year, the Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility Grant Program provided a total of \$99,700 to 32 eligible educational providers, of which \$91,310.05 was spent. The program continues to be successful in increasing access to menstrual hygiene products in safe spaces throughout participating Colorado schools. Participating educational providers report that students are accessing free products and that there are minimal challenges with the grant.



Endnotes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

^{viii} Ibid

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

^x Ibid