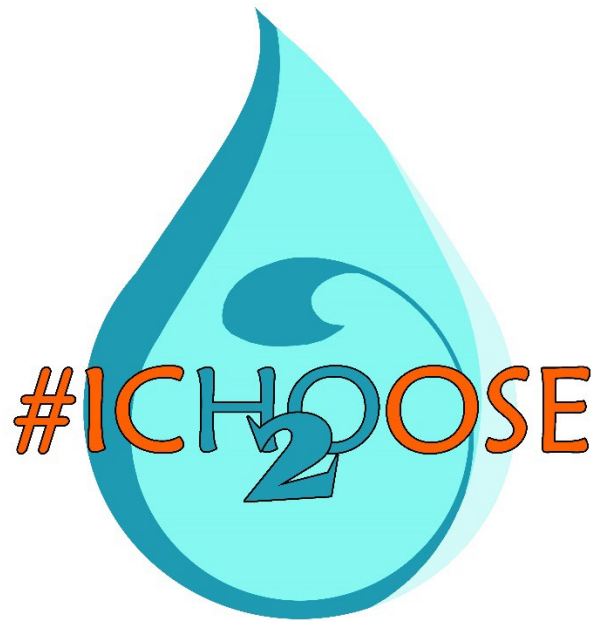


I Choose H₂O Challenge Guide



University of New Mexico, Prevention Research Center

2025



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Introduction

Congratulations, you are invited to be part of the “**I Choose H2O**” challenge!

The purpose of this challenge is to promote increased water consumption and decreased sugar-sweetened beverage (SSB) consumption among adolescents in New Mexico middle schools. The campaign educates youth on the risks of sugar, while promoting the benefits of water through fun activities and school-wide competition to encourage youth to change beverage consumption knowledge and habits to increase consumption of water. Although many of us try to lead a healthy lifestyle, it is sometimes difficult to do so. “I Choose H2O” is designed to make it easier for students and school staff to drink more water and decrease consumption of SSBs.

Why Adolescents?

Adolescents are a population that is usually marginalized and rarely given a voice. They are at the transformative developmental stage in their lives where they are formulating their identities, defining themselves as unique individuals, and coming out from under the shadows of their parent’s beliefs. At the same time, they are striving to fit in with their peers, to be cool and popular, and earn social credibility. They spend a great deal of their lives being told what to do by their teachers, families, and other adults, and rarely given the space to think for themselves or to engage in critical thinking about the world around them.

Challenge Overview: I Choose H2O

Purpose

“I Choose H2O” was designed by the University of New Mexico (UNM) Prevention Research Center (PRC) with funds from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed). The purpose is to help middle school students increase their daily consumption of water while decreasing consumption of SSBs through a 3-week school-wide challenge.

Although our primary audience is middle school-aged children, school staff have a great deal of influence over student’s behaviors. This campaign is designed to involve school staff in making healthy decisions regarding consumption of water and SSBs, while they have fun together.

Directions

All students and staff are invited to participate in the “I Choose H2O” challenge for 3 weeks. During this 3-week campaign, there will be a daily challenge for students and staff. They can track their progress on Tracking Posters provided to each homeroom teach (or as designated by the school). Each day, students and staff will track their progress to earn rewards for themselves and for their team in the school-wide competition.

Goal

Students and school staff will develop healthy habits to increase water consumption and decrease SSB consumption during the 3-week campaign and after.

Below are the key aspects of the campaign implementation, as indicated by our experience:

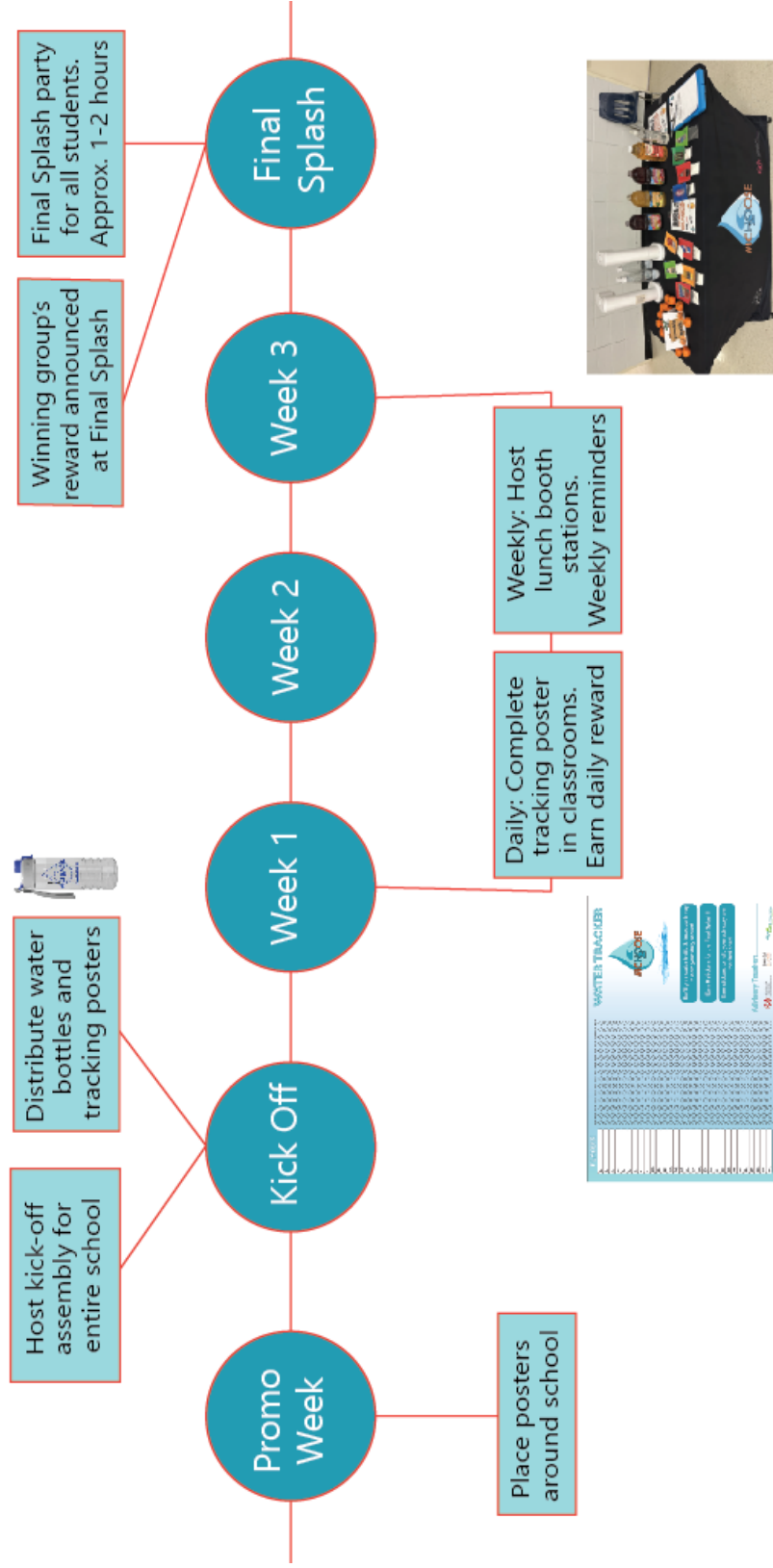
1. Using provided water bottles.
2. Having all students and staff attend the Kick-Off.
3. Hanging easily visible campaign posters abundantly throughout the school in high-traffic areas.
4. Filling out the Tracking Posters in classrooms each day.
5. Distributing all incentives (see page 11).
6. Announcing and hosting Lunch Booth activities for students and staff.
7. Having a Final Splash event at the end of the 3-week challenge.
8. Getting all school staff involved to help support the challenge!

H A V E F U N !

I Choose H2O



Timeline



Event Planning

Before

- UNM Team works with challenge leader students (class/club) for one session before the campaign begins.
- Place promotional posters around the school.

Week 1

- Kick-Off Assembly.
- All students receive a water bottle.
- All homeroom teachers receive tracking posters.
 - Students and staff track progress each day.
- All homeroom teachers receive reward stickers.
- Lunch Booth activity mid-week.

Week 2

- Students and staff track progress each day on tracking posters.
- Lunch Booth activity mid-week.

Week 3

- Students and staff track progress each day on tracking posters.
- Lunch Booth activity mid-week.
- At the end of the 3 weeks tally team points.

Final Splash & Winning Team Reward

- Winning team announced.
 - Winning team receives reward.
- Final Splash party for all students and staff.

Kick-Off

- Set a date and time at the start of the challenge.
- We recommend at least 30 minutes for this school-wide assembly during school.
- Identify students who can help present.
- Hand out water bottles as students leave, or back in classrooms right after the kick-off.
- Provide each homeroom teacher with a tracking poster and incentive stickers.

Final Splash

- Set a date and time.
- We recommend at least 1 hour for this school-wide party during school.
- Make sure to promote the Final Splash throughout the 3-week campaign. The students' excitement about this event will help encourage them to participate in the challenge.
- We do not recommend combining the Final Splash with other events. The focus should be strictly on fun and healthy water options. In order to reinforce the campaign's message, please restrict access to unhealthy foods and drinks at this event.
- Have a backup plan for holding your Final Splash inside for inclement weather.
- Each school's Final Splash will be somewhat different. We suggest that you use your community's assets to create an exciting celebration tailored to your school.
- Most importantly, create an event that is FUN for everyone!

Suggestions for the Final Splash Activities:

- **Fruit-infused-water activity.** You chop the fruit, but students make their own fruit-infused water (or pre-infuse water dispensers for students to fill up their cups/water bottles!).
- Invite **valued and respected members of your community** to the Fun Day. (Political leaders, firemen, The National Guard)
- Students love to **dance**! Invite a Zumba instructor, or have some other type of dance activity.
- **Freeze-tag** is a simple yet fun activity for students.
- **Relay races** are always tons of fun.
- **Sport team members** from your local high or middle school's basketball, soccer, football, or volleyball team can help do drills with students or play games.
- **Radar gun activity.** Ask state or local police to attend with their radar gun and have them measure how fast the kids can run.
- **Parachutes**, if available, are always great fun.
- **Hula-hoops** and **jump ropes** are easy, fun and usually available.
- **Corn hole, twister, or other games** are easy to set up and fun for students.

Challenge Leaders

We find that when the I Choose H2O challenge is developed and implemented by the students, it has the biggest success in the school. Before the campaign, the UNM Team would like to meet with a group of Challenge Leaders (leadership, school council, etc. students) who are motivated to lead the challenge in their school.

Challenge Leaders

- About 5-15 students.
- Leadership, school council, health class, etc. students.
- Challenge Leaders should be motivated students who will work to run and promote the I Choose H2O challenge in the school.
- Challenge Leaders will help to plan and host the Lunch Booths.
- Challenge Leaders will sign up to help host one Lunch Booth.

UNM Team Sessions

- Meet 1 time with Challenge Leaders before the start of the campaign.
- Challenge Leaders will learn about the importance of drinking water, and ways to make drinking water more fun.
- Challenge Leaders will help to hang promotion around the school to promote the upcoming campaign.
- Challenge Leaders will learn how to use the Tracking Posters and help lead the Tracking Posters in their classes.

Incentives

- **Water Bottles**

- Each student will receive a water bottle at the Kick-Off assembly.

- **Stickers**

- Students earn a reward sticker each day that they complete the daily challenge and fill out the tracking poster.

- **Winning Team Reward**

- The team with the most points (water droplets filled out on the tracking poster) will receive a reward.
 - Possible rewards:
 - Extra party/play time.
 - Homework pass.
 - Extra water activity.
 - Other reward provided by your school.

Appendix 1: Suggestions

Ensuring Campaign Success (Critical Campaign Elements):

- Using the water bottles.
- Hanging multiple easily seen posters and banners throughout the school.
- Filling out the water tracking posters daily.
- Having a Final Splash event at the end of the 3-week campaign.
- Getting other school staff involved! Art teacher, nurse, PE coach, music teacher, principal, etc.

Suggestions for Increasing Campaign Awareness

1. Promote the campaign during school announcements and at other events.
2. Hang as many posters and banners as possible throughout the school.
Make sure to have them where students make decisions: cafeteria, gym, restrooms, water fountains, outside, heavy traffic areas, main entrance, offices, classrooms, hallways.
3. Organize Lunch Booths each week to maintain participation and fun.
4. Weekly announcements will help encourage students to participate. The scripts can be given to the principal and read during the weekly school announcements. The script can also be given directly to teachers who can read it aloud to the class, or a student can read the announcement.

Suggestions for Weekly Announcement Scripts

These scripts are a good start for morning announcements, but please modify them, add, etc. to make them personalized to your school and the challenge specifications! Maybe you also want to do announcements at the end of the day to remind students to bring their bottles to school the next day.

- **Week 1:** Good morning everyone. Today we kick off our “I Choose H2O” Challenge for all players. For the next three weeks, we are going to make delicious drink recipes and challenge each other to drink more water! Remember to fill out the tracking poster each day to earn rewards for yourself and your team! Good luck players and see you at the Final Splash!
- **Week 2:** Good morning I Choose H2O players and congratulations on completing Week 1 of the Challenge; Have you noticed how much more energy you have because you’re drinking more water? Be sure to continue to fill out the tracking posters. The more water drops you collect, the more prizes you win for yourself and your team. See you at the Final Splash!

Week 3: Good morning I Choose H2O players! This is the final week of I Choose H2O and I am so impressed with how many of you have been drinking water and filling out the tracker. I can’t wait to see you all for our big celebration at the Final Splash!

Appendix 2: Contact Information

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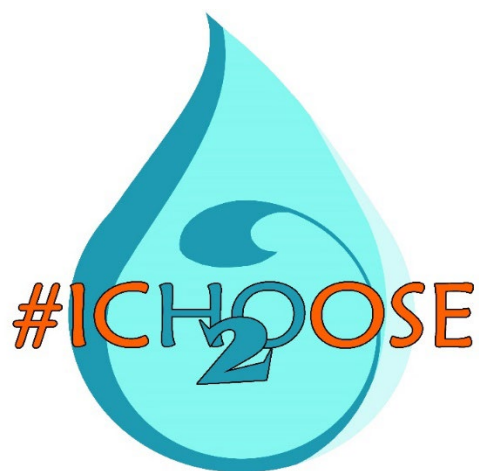
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Please contact us any time with questions, comments, or suggestions—
or to share a success story.



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