

# Wyandanch

Community Advisory Board

## In This Newsletter

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## June Events

- **Owl Discovery : A Wildlife Center of Long Island Presentation,**  
Wyandanch Public Library,  
June 12, 2-3:00pm
- **Wyandanch Family Day,**  
Wyandanch Park, June 14
- **Summer Reading Kickoff,**  
Wyandanch Park,  
June 14, 9:00am - 5:00pm
- **Catholic Health Mobile Van,**  
Wyandanch Public Library,  
June 16, 10:00am - 2:00pm
- **Juneteenth,** June 19

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[NYSHECK.ORG/Wyandanch](http://NYSHECK.ORG/Wyandanch)



## Creating Healthy Schools and Communities

### *The Advocacy of Karyn Kirschbaum, PhD*



*Health Schools and Communities Long Island, Facebook (2014)*

Interview & Article by Tara Lauther

**D**r. Karyn Kirschbaum, School Health Policy Coordinator at Western Suffolk BOCES, has spent the last two decades shaping healthier environments for schools and communities across Long Island. In her nearly 19 years at BOCES, Dr. Kirschbaum has led initiatives under New York State Department of Health grants such as “Creating Healthy Schools and Communities” (CHSC), weaving together food access, physical activity, wellness policy, and community partnerships.

While she plans to retire soon, Dr. Kirschbaum is staying on part-time to help complete the final year of the current CHSC grant. Her dedication to improving public health—especially in historically underserved areas like Wyandanch—has created long-lasting partnerships and meaningful change.

Dr. Kirschbaum's career is a testament to the power of showing up, partnering across sectors, and trusting the community.

## Growing a Public Health Legacy

Dr. Kirschbaum began her career in prevention-focused nonprofit work, then transitioned into public health through her work with BOCES. Over time, the scope of her work expanded—from tobacco policy, to school wellness to food systems and community partnerships.

Her doctoral research focused on women practicing yoga during or after breast cancer treatment, reflecting a personal and professional commitment to holistic wellness. “I became a huge believer in being proactive and really taking care,” including personal wellness, which connects to community wellness, she explained.

At the core of her work lies an understanding that community health cannot be addressed in silos. Dr. Kirschbaum is a community builder who regularly connects schools, pantries, libraries, and municipal programs in practical and sustainable ways. “Sustainability is like the highest fruit on the tree,” she said. When speaking on how to create trust and to engage with local communities, Dr. Kirshbaum shares, “We go in the back door. We go in, but we can't make any changes. We're foreigners visiting a school or a community setting. And so I always say we can go into a lot of back doors or windows, but we have to find that one champion who will open up the [front] door for us, and then hopefully they bring in some of their colleagues”. These champions— a principal, pantry volunteer, or teacher—become the bridge between external resources and the people who need them most. This model of respectful entry and sustained partnership has been essential to the success of initiatives in Wyandanch and beyond.



*A tower garden at Bay Shore Middle School*  
Photo Source: Health Schools and Communities  
Long Island, Facebook (2025)

Her involvement in Wyandanch spans years and includes regular participation in the Wyandanch Leadership meetings. **“The trust is there. I’ve met so many people, and I really cherish the relationships I’ve established,”** she shared.

One of her proudest local projects involves tower gardens—indoor aeroponic systems installed in Wyandanch schools and the public library. **“We’re not walking away. We want to connect the dots—middle school to library to town hall—and encourage everyone who has a tower to name it, give it a personality, and broadcast it.”** This initiative encourages partnerships between schools and public spaces involved in caring for the tower gardens. This project and others like it have been made possible through both CHSC monies and a legislative grant secured from former Assemblywoman, the Honorable Kimberly Jean-Pierre, whose team attended a BOCES conference and was inspired by the tower gardens' impact. One tower costs about \$1,200. Each tower brings opportunities for education and engagement.

# Q&A with Dr. Kirschbaum

## Q: What does the “Creating Healthy Schools and Communities” initiative look like in action?

**A:** “For the first few years at BOCES, we were working under a grant called Healthy Tobacco Free Schools, and that focused primarily on tobacco policy... It was frustrating work because even though tobacco use was a large issue, it was only one among the many that schools faced.” Now, “With Creating Healthy Schools and Communities, we're finishing, the fourth year of this five year grant. The elevator speech is: increasing access to affordable, nourishing food and opportunities for physical activity.” CHSC works outside of the school setting as well, working with any community setting where food is sold or distributed. Even vending machines can provide healthier snacks.



*Dr. Kirschbaum led yoga at Wyandanch Plaza (August 2024).*

Photo Source: Wyandanch Plaza Association Facebook

## Q: What are some examples of successful partnerships or strategies that have made a meaningful impact during your work?

**A:** “One of the things we know is that we can’t just work with an individual, a class, a site, or a pantry. We have to communicate it, even if it is the tiniest little success! We create one-page success stories, mostly pictures, and share them across classrooms, pantries, and school districts”. They are cumulative. The more success stories you have, the stories get louder and louder. You can make an impact. In particular, I love when we establish a permanent partnership. We are working with some of the college pantries and we are very excited about this. Two of our four partners have paid pantry coordinators.”

A Little Food and Community, Inc. is a local nonprofit that partners with local pantries in order to provide food and personal items. Ideally, the CEO and founder, Krystal Johnson prefers to establish an ongoing relationship with the site to ensure sustainability. Dr. Kirschbaum shares that she met Krystal at a Wyandanch leadership meeting and introduced her to the Farmingdale State College Food Pantry Director. Now they can work together on a more long-term basis.





*Tower garden of MLK students*

Photo Source: Creating Health Schools and Communities  
Wyandanch Leadership Council Meeting PowerPoint (2020)



Photo Source: Creating Health Schools and Communities  
Wyandanch Leadership Council Meeting PowerPoint (2020)



*Wyandanch Public Library partnered with Healthy Schools and Communities to discuss strategies to increase physical activity and healthier snack options for patrons.*

Photo Source: Health Schools and Communities Long Island, Facebook (2025)

## **Q: Can you speak to specific initiatives that have taken place in Wyandanch schools?**

**A:** “Right before COVID-19, I had done a school board presentation where I had a running slide show of 100 slides of everything we had done [including]: Walk with a Doc, Math & Movement, the physical activity programs, and high school [wellness] leaders visiting the library. One really successful initiative was Yoga 4 Classrooms.”

Yoga 4 Classrooms is a resource for children in schools.... At the time, the Assistant Principal of MLO, Mr. Darryl Tue (currently AP at LFH Elementary School), was Dr. Kirschbaum’s champion. Dr. Kirschbaum and her intern at the time, spent a day in the faculty lounge providing Yoga 4 Classrooms tools for all interested teachers and staff. The feedback was extremely positive as was reported at a faculty meeting sometime afterward. Dr. Kirschbaum hopes to re-establish this program with the support of the middle school’s principal, social worker and other wellness leaders.

## **Q: What inspired your interest in public health and school wellness, particularly in relation to food insecurity?**

**A:** “The big umbrella of wellness really encompasses everything— from how an individual takes care... to the larger question of can they take care? Do they have access to affordable food, shelter, or the community health center? ...There can absolutely be food insecurity and there can be neighborhood bodegas where there is cheap, unhealthy food that is easy to access. There may be food pantries, but do people have transportation? Do they know about them? Are they choosing healthy options at the pantry?”



**Change takes time. “It’s like one initiative at a time. Very slow.” she said. But if you “connect the dots”—across people, places, and programs—it adds up.**

Dr. Kirschbaum’s philosophy of change is rooted in persistence, trust, and empathy. From her early days addressing tobacco use in schools to her current efforts growing food and wellness literacy with tower gardens and story walks, she’s kept one thing constant: listening. The Wyandanch Community Advisory Board thanks Dr. Kirschbaum for her continued partnership and her commitment to children’s environmental health. Her impact will be felt for years to come.

# PREVENTING CHRONIC DISEASE

PUBLIC HEALTH RESEARCH, PRACTICE, AND POLICY

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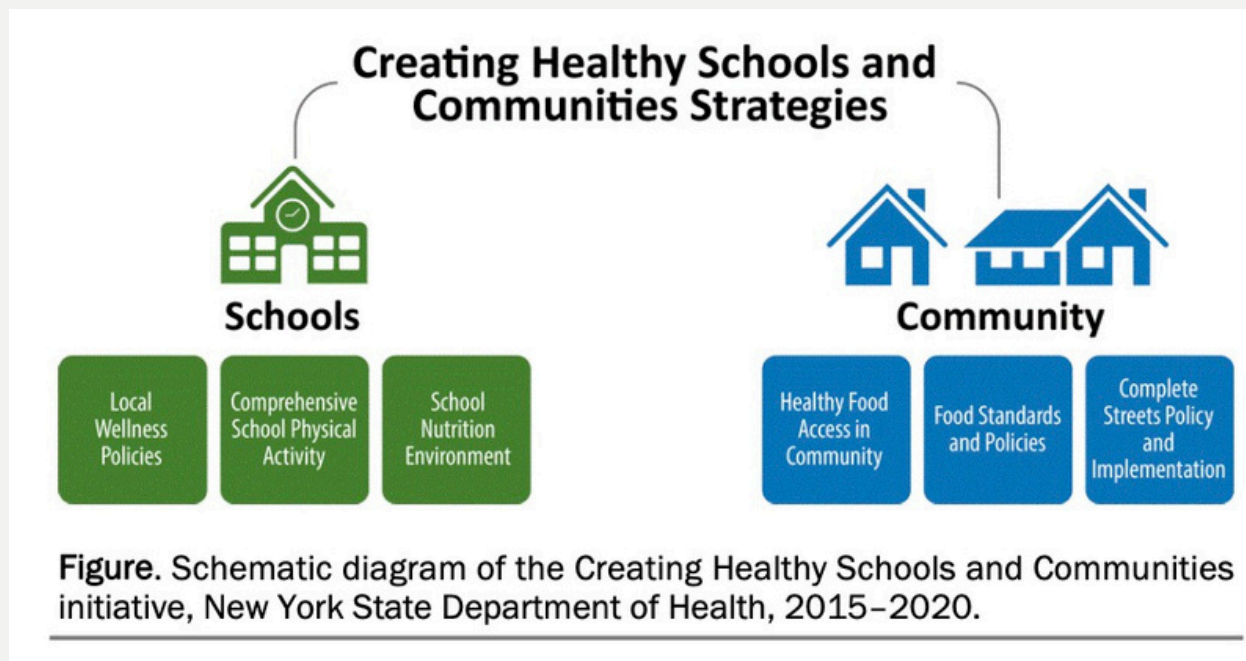
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COMMENTARY

## Overcoming Challenges Resulting From COVID-19: New York State's Creating Healthy Schools and Communities Initiative

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Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC) is a 5-year (2015–2020), coordinated, multisector initiative of the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) with the goal of reducing major risk factors of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic diseases in 85 high-need school districts and associated communities (N = 266). CHSC practitioners (CPs) work with individuals, schools, government, businesses, and other groups to share ideas, plan, and act to improve access to healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity.



**What is already known on this topic?** Increasing access or reducing barriers to healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity are central to encouraging and supporting healthy behaviors that prevent chronic disease at a population level. While strategies to increase access or reduce barriers are generally difficult to implement, the COVID-19 pandemic has added challenges.

**Collectively planning for the future:** COVID-19 highlighted areas in need of intervention related to food access, physical activity, and active transportation. It has also served as a “forced pause,” offering CPs the opportunity to think strategically and creatively about how to build and strengthen partnerships, enhance communication channels, connect particular populations with resources, and advance efforts when the pandemic subsides.

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