

Building Support for PHS in Your School and Community

Chapter 2



‘Be the change you want to see in the world.’
Mahatma Gandhi

It has taken over five years for Project Healthy Schools (PHS) to grow into the multifaceted program it is today. To build the program, we had to develop relationships and find support from the school and the community. This chapter provides information on how you can find and leverage your best allies in your own school to start your program.

Getting School Buy-In

Establishing Initial Support

The first step in implementing PHS in your school is to gather support at the highest level and accumulate the necessary funds. To do this, we approached several school board members who introduced the idea to the school board. The school board provided several gifts, which we were able to increase using matching dollars. We also approached several area businesses and leaders who made additional gifts that the University of Michigan (UM) Cardiovascular Center matched. After the funding was secured, we chose a school principal who would be receptive to being the first school in the program. (More information about the budget is presented in Chapter 6).

Finding Your Wellness Champion

After the school is determined, it is essential to identify a wellness champion in the school to support your efforts. This person is the internal link between the program and the school and can help you fit PHS into the school structure. Fostering your relationship with the wellness champion is the key to making PHS part of the school culture as they perform many critical duties:

- Help the PHS coordinator plan and implement events.
- Share information about the program within the school to staff members.
- Post program announcements.
- Direct you to key contacts within the school.
- Give advice on the best ways to reach their colleagues, students, and parents.

A wellness champion can be an administrator, teacher, counselor, support staff, or parent. This person is usually enthusiastic, well-connected, and able to motivate others. In addition, the wellness champion should have a good understanding of how the school works and be respected by others so as to influence the success of the program.



A fresh fruit and vegetable cart at an Ann Arbor school.

Lessons Learned: Wellness Champions

- We found it helpful to ask the principal for his or her recommendation for a wellness champion.
- Our current wellness champions include an assistant principal, teachers, and a counselor. They have been invaluable as the principal is often too busy to take on this role.
- The wellness champion should be easily accessible, as there is a great deal of communication involved in this role.

Building Relationships with School Staff

After identifying your wellness champion, you can begin to lay the groundwork for PHS. Successful programs like PHS rely on multiple school contacts, many who are interested in healthy lifestyles. Each person can make a unique contribution to the program, so it is important to keep the entire staff informed, motivated, and involved.

Ideal School Contacts :

- **Principal and Assistant Principal** – Building a relationship with the principal and/or the assistant principal is the first step in making other connections possible. They can help determine whether the school will embrace PHS.