Project Healthy Schools Goals

- Eat more fruits and vegetables
- Choose less sugary food and beverages
- Eat less fast and fatty food
- Be active every day
- Spend less time in front of a screen

Marshall Greene Middle School in Birch Run and White Pine Middle School in Saginaw are on the list of “Schools to Watch.” Other PHS schools mentioned previously are Clague Middle School in Ann Arbor and East Middle School in Plymouth. Only 13 schools in Michigan received this honor.

PHS arranged for Common Cycle and Back Alley Bikes to take about 180 abandoned bikes from U-M campus, restore them and make them available to kids in PHS schools.

Ishpeming Middle School and Cherryland Middle School won $2,150 and $500 respectively in the Fire Up Your Feet competition. Learn more at http://mi.freuppyourfeet.org/

Florine Mark, president and CEO of the WW Group, Inc., interviewed PHS Manager Jean DuRussel-Weston on the Remarkable Woman radio show.

Did you know?

- Labiba Omar (pictured) and her cousin Raisa Faatimah worked together to implement a pilot of the PHS program at two schools in Bangladesh.

This fall, 300 students in two schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh started Project Healthy Schools (PHS). How did PHS wind up in Bangladesh? The story starts many years ago, when Raisa Faatimah, whose parents are from Bangladesh and who spends her summers in Bangladesh, was a student at Clague Middle School in Ann Arbor. Faatimah experienced Project Healthy Schools (PHS) for the first time as a sixth grader at Clague. Later, as a high school student, she served as a PHS Health Ambassador, teaching the PHS lessons to sixth-graders as part of her Science of Wellness class. After her Health Ambassador experience, she started thinking about how much the students in Bangladesh could benefit from PHS. “[The fast food craze hit the country] like a tsunami… Within 10 to 15 years, you’re seeing this sudden obesity epidemic that past generations don’t know how to handle,” said Faatimah.

Faatimah, who is now a junior at U-M, reached out to PHS, and Program Manager Jean DuRussel-Weston put her in touch with Eva Kline-Rogers, who manages the Michigan Clinical Outcomes Research and Reporting Program (MCORRP) that handles all PHS research. “Eva encouraged me to apply to MCORRP so they would be able to manage the research component of my project. The following summer, between my freshman and sophomore years, I worked for MCORRP the entire summer where, under the really amazing guidance of Eva Kline-Rogers, we talked through the project logistics, and who we could work with to make this happen,” See “Bangladesh” on back page

Cherry Capital Foods partnership brings local produce to schools

Cherry Capital Foods is a food distributor based in Traverse City that purchases exclusively from Michigan farmers and producers. PHS is partnering with Cherry Capital Foods to bring more local produce into school cafeterias and help food service directors connect to farm-to-cafeteria resources.

When schools serve local food, 33% of students eat more fruits and vegetables. Increasing student interest in trying new, healthy food is core to PHS’ mission; however, working with local food on an institutional scale can be daunting for school food service directors. Cherry Capital Foods finds ways to integrate local food within a school’s existing operations, does the leg-work of sourcing from Michigan farmers in the volumes needed for school food service programs, and delivers directly to the school. Cherry Capital Foods also ensures food safety practices are followed and offers a one-stop ordering system for food purchasers.

PHS is connecting food service directors from first-year schools with a Cherry Capital Foods representative to place orders for two PHS-sponsored food tastings. PHS also encourages food service directors to take advantage of Cherry Capital Foods’ other resources and products, such as farm-to-school marketing and educational materials. Cherry Capital Foods collects and shares data on the amount of local food purchased by each school so schools know how many servings of local fruits and vegetables are provided to their students.
Myra Weiss, M.D., a retired internist from Bloomfield Hills, joined the Project Healthy Schools Advisory Board about 18 months ago at the suggestion of her friend and fellow board member, Janis Wetsman. Since retiring from her medical practice in early 2016, in addition to joining the PHS board, Dr. Weiss is also volunteering as a commissioner for the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C. “Both of these opportunities have opened a new world to me. I was strictly in the medical profession previously which was demanding of my time. I was also raising a family. But now I have the luxury of time to spend doing things which I also truly enjoy,” said Dr. Weiss.

As a physician, Dr. Weiss says she often saw the end stage of an unhealthy lifestyle; of having too much weight and not being physically active, of smoking, and of sitting too much. She said, “There’s only so much you can do to correct problems like that from progressing, unless you start very, very young. And if children learn to eat properly, to exercise daily, to be active, it creates a healthy body and a healthy mind. “It’s not difficult to explain to the children what their futures depend on,” said Dr. Weiss. “I think the approach of the entire [PHS] group is to be able to say to children, “If you make small changes now, this can have such an important outcome for your future wellbeing.””

Dr. Weiss also thinks it’s important to make health messages fun for children. Thinking about her visit to a school to observe a PHS lesson, she said, “I remember how creative the different activities were, and how enthusiastic the children were. And I think that if we can present a positive approach to these important lifestyle changes, the children not only accept them and enjoy the experience, but then they take these experiences home and teach their families how to use them in everyday life.”

Dr. Weiss is impressed with the results of the PHS program. She said, “I think it’s fascinating, if you read the scientific articles that Dr. Eagle has headlined, that show the actual changes in parameters, even after just a very brief period of time, when children change their behaviors. It’s gratifying to see their cholesterol numbers go down, their blood sugar numbers go down, their diastolic blood pressures go down.” These changes are significant to Dr. Weiss because she has seen the devastating impact of conditions, such as hypertension, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and renal problems, that can result from high cholesterol and high blood sugar levels.

“My very impressed with the leadership of Dr. Eagle,” said Dr. Weiss. “I think he has a strong vision of what he wants to achieve and he uses this group of fairly dynamic people to help him get there. He has people on the board from different walks of life who are dedicated to helping him, whether it’s with philanthropy or programming, they have been able to achieve amazing results.”

Wellness champions and principals from at least 25 schools traveled to East Lansing on November 13 for a day of learning and networking at the Project Healthy Schools Fall Wellness Champion Gathering. The jam-packed agenda included presentations, panel discussions, lunch-hour roundtable discussions, question and answer sessions and awards. Participants received continuing education credits for the day.

This year PHS invited some outside experts to present. Matt Phelan from the American Cancer Society presented, “Advocacy 101,” on communicating with legislators. He said that many of the same principles for communicating with legislators apply to advocating for wellness programs within schools and communities. He also encouraged everyone to reach out to their legislators and invite them to school events.

The presentation that attendees rated as the most beneficial was about the InPACT program. InPACT stands for Interrupting Prolonged Sitting with Activity. Dr. Rebecca Hasson from U-M’s School of Kinesiology and PHS’ Ben Ransier shared the results of last year’s pilot program, which had teachers incorporate brief (about three minutes) activity breaks throughout the school day. Results included that students were better able to focus on the lessons after an activity break and 99% of students were back on task within 30 seconds of completing the activity breaks. The InPACT program is now available to all PHS schools through the PHS portal.

Retired physician, Myra Weiss, joins the PHS Advisory Board

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Top 10 Lessons Learned from Project Healthy Schools

A recent PHS manuscript, “Top 10 Lessons Learned from Project Healthy Schools” was published in the August issue of the American Journal of Medicine. This article reviewed all PHS publications over the past 12 years, consolidating results to identify important themes.

The manuscript highlights that while over 35% of PHS students were overweight or obese, participation in the program resulted in improved physiologic measures and healthy behaviors. These results have proven to be sustainable for up to four years post-program. Additionally, while students from low-income communities demonstrated worse health (poorer physiological parameters and unhealthier lifestyles) at the beginning of the program, students from both high- and low-income communities showed significant improvements in physiologic and lifestyle measures following the PHS intervention.

Some associations were made between various health parameters. For example, students who spent more than two hours on a mobile device were also more likely to spend time participating in other forms of screen time (TV, computer, video games) and less time being physically active. Additionally, blood pressure and BMI were higher in students who watched more television (“passive” screen time) when compared to students who participated in more “active” screen time activities (computer, video games). As expected, students with unhealthy lifestyles had worse physiological parameters, and gender differences existed in both physiologic and behavioral risk factors.

Environmental changes (e.g. class challenges, bulletin boards, physical activity challenges, cafeteria changes) implemented in the schools were shown to encourage improved health behaviors, in comparison with the health curriculum alone. PHS was created by and has been sustained through the continued support of a large number of community organizations, health systems and philanthropists. This collaboration has been key to the remarkable success of the program.

PHS partners with U-M nephrologists to address kidney disease prevention

Two Michigan Medicine nephrologists, Julie Wright-Nunes, M.D. and Pandu Rao, M.D., are collaborating with PHS to raise awareness about kidney disease prevention, especially among students in Detroit, a high-risk area for chronic kidney disease and morbidity. The risk factors for heart disease and chronic kidney disease (CKD) are very similar.

Drs. Wright-Nunes and Rao, present annually on kidney health to Cody High School students in PHS’ high school program called the Science of Wellness. The interactive presentation includes topics such as the anatomy of the kidney, kidney function, kidney-related health screening, pathology of the kidney and how to keep the kidneys healthy. Students also participate in a lab simulation of a kidney screening, testing fake urine with a dipstick analysis. Remarkably, 48% of the students said they have family or friends with kidney disease and they will share what they learned with others.

This fall, students from Cody’s Science of Wellness class visited Michigan Medicine’s Frankel Cardiovascular Center as well as the Division of Nephrology. They toured the nephrology clinic and the nephrology floor of the hospital where they saw patients receiving kidney dialysis. Nephrologists met with the students to answer questions and provide information about healthcare-related careers.

The next step in the collaboration includes piloting a three-lesson kidney education module at two middle schools – East
Bangladesh continued from page one

said Faatimah.

Their first step was completing a needs assessment. Faatimah reached out to physicians in Bangladesh, “and the physicians told us that what they’re seeing is a juvenile diabetes epidemic,” said Faatimah.

With the need confirmed, a steering committee composed of experts from the U.S. and Bangladesh was formed to help guide the project. The steering committee recommended dividing the project into six phases: (1) modification of curriculum, (2) outreach to interested schools, (3) pilot the program in English speaking schools, (4) revision of the curriculum based on the pilot, (5) translation of finalized curriculum into the native language, (6) program expansion into more schools.

Faatimah consulted with school teachers in Bangladesh and faculty at the University of Michigan to evaluate whether and how the PHS curriculum needed to be modified to work for Bangladeshi students. “In Bangladesh exercise opportunities were much more limited than in America, since children aren’t offered intramural sports at their schools and there’s a stigma against women’s sports and women exercising publicly,” said Faatimah.

Another cultural difference is that 99% of the Bangladeshi population fasts for religious purposes. Faatima continued, “In Bangladesh, when people break their fast they eat mostly fried foods. So the one or two meals they’re having during their fast day consist almost entirely of fried foods. We wanted to incorporate how children should break their fast with a healthy meal.”

The curriculum modifications took over 18 months to complete. The “PHS Finale” lesson was replaced with a new lesson called “Exercise Around the World,” which empowers students to find ways to move their bodies within the constraints of their own culture. The “Jump Start Your Day” lesson, which is normally about eating a healthy breakfast, was changed to a lesson about healthy ways to break your fast. The “I Am From” lesson was revised to include a social awareness component that addresses food availability, since half the students in Bangladesh are overfed and half are under nourished.

Last summer Faatimah returned to Bangladesh to find schools interested in piloting the program. “We were originally just going to present the material, propose the PHS program, and then talk about how and when we could implement the program, but the schools were just so enthusiastic that we were able to move forward and train the Health Ambassadors and set up the whole program,” said Faatimah.

Faatimah enlisted the help of her cousin, Labiba Omar, who is a college student in Bangladesh, to assist with training high school students to serve as the Health Ambassadors who teach the middle school lessons. Omar also acted as an on-site wellness coordinator, monitoring the Health Ambassadors, working with the schools to schedule the lessons and reporting progress back to Faatimah.

As of December 2017, phases one through three have been completed with a successful pilot run of the revised curriculum at the Faizur Rahman Ideal Institute in Mohammadpur, Dhaka and at the Akij Foundation School and College in Uttara, Dhaka.

Memorial FIT Kids celebrates 10 years of PHS partnership

Memorial FIT Kids first partnered with the University of Michigan’s Project Healthy Schools program in 2008 when Corunna Middle School became the first school in Shiawassee County to implement the PHS program. Since then, Memorial FIT Kids has expanded the program to all 10 schools in Memorial Healthcare’s service area. Memorial Healthcare in Owosso was the first health system to partner with PHS to bring the program to schools in their service area.

On October 23, 2017, Kim Eagle, M.D., co-founder of PHS, presented a plaque and a certificate of appreciation to Jennifer Dennis and Tina Coffman in recognition of 10 years of partnership. Eagle said, “Memorial FIT Kids is one of our most valued partners. They are great collaborators with a shared focus on reducing childhood obesity and long-term cardiovascular disease risk among Shiawassee area youth.”

PHS especially wants to recognize the efforts of four Memorial Healthcare employees who have been instrumental in the success of this program. Becky Dahlke and Cathy Stevenson formed the original partnership with Project Healthy Schools and started the program in the Shiawassee area schools. Jennifer Dennis and Tina Coffman are currently implementing the program in the Shiawassee area schools. Dennis is the on-site coordinator in the schools.

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We are also grateful to the many other corporations, foundations and individual donors who have supported PHS over the years.

Information on how to donate is available at www.projecthealthyschools.org or by contacting Ryann Eff at 734-998-6044

The Project Healthy Schools newsletter is distributed three times per year.