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

Did you know?

- Ben Ransier and Rachel Ray joined the PHS team this fall. Ransier is a wellness coordinator and Ray is an intern from the U-M School of Social Work.
- PHS Founder, Kim Eagle, M.D., was interviewed about PHS research on WEMU radio. Listen at: https://wemu.org/post/study-reveals-education-can-keep-students-healthy#stream/0

UnitedHealthcare grant supports PHS in Washtenaw County

On November 2, 2015, Rosie Reebel of UnitedHealthcare presented Project Healthy Schools (PHS) with a $24,000 check to help support the program in seven middle schools in Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti. PHS was one of five organizations to receive a grant from UnitedHealthcare to support healthy eating and physical activity for Michigan youth.

“We received numerous applications, and are thrilled to announce awards to community organizations and nonprofits across the state that are developing creative ways to engage youth in healthy activity and strengthen access to the quality health care,” said Dennis Mouras, CEO of UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of Michigan.

UnitedHealthcare serves more than 700,000 people in Michigan enrolled in employersponsored, individual, Medicare and Medicaid health plans, with a care provider network of 172 hospitals and nearly 29,000 physicians statewide.

Support from BCBSM, MDHHS and Superior Health Foundation leads to 8 new BHC schools

Additional funding from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and Superior Health Foundation allowed PHS to expand the Building Healthy Communities: Engaging Middle Schools through Project Healthy Schools program to eight schools this fall, rather than five as originally planned. The new schools include:

- E. F. Rittmueller Middle School in Frankenmuth (Saginaw County)
- Ishpeming Middle School in Ishpeming (Marquette County)
- Kalkaska Middle School in Kalkaska (Kalkaska County)
- New Branches Charter Academy in Grand Rapids (Kent County)
- Newberry High School in Newberry (Luce County)
- Pittsford Area Schools in Pittsford (Hillsdale County)
- Powell Middle School in Washington (Macomb County)
- St. Mary School in Pinckney (Livingston County)

Two of the schools are in the Upper Peninsula. The grant from Superior Health Foundation helps offset the additional costs of implementing the program in the Upper Peninsula. Building Healthy Communities: Engaging middle schools through Project Healthy Schools is a partnership between Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and the University of Michigan.
Making a lasting impression on a sixth grader isn’t easy, but Kaavya Puttagunta, now a junior at the University of Michigan, still vividly remembers several of the Project Healthy Schools (PHS) lessons that she participated in when she was a sixth grader at Forsythe Middle School in Ann Arbor. Puttagunta is now on a pre-med track at the University of Michigan, majoring in Spanish with a minor in Gender, Race, and Nation and a secondary minor in Biology.

Puttagunta said, “The lessons that I remember the most were the fat lesson, where you held the pound of fat, versus the pound of muscle, and you were able to see what the difference was; or the lesson where you spooned out the sugar in the drinks and you were able to see, ‘Wow! That is what I’m actually drinking! That’s what’s in there!’ It made more sense to us than to say, ‘You are having 37 grams of sugar in a Coke can,’ which isn’t going to mean anything, and still doesn’t really mean anything to me until I see it in a cup next to the Coke can.”

Puttagunta recently shared her experiences with PHS at a PHS Advisory Board meeting. She said she participated in PHS in sixth grade and returned in twelfth grade as a PHS Health Ambassador, teaching PHS lessons to sixth graders as part of Skyline High School’s Science of Wellness Class. “Science of Wellness is kind of an older kids’ version of the PHS curriculum. In order to be a health ambassador, we were required to take Science of Wellness,” said Puttagunta.

Thinking back on her experience as a health ambassador, Puttagunta said initially she was worried that the kids wouldn’t be interested in learning about nutrition and would resent giving up their Advisory Class study time for the lessons. She thought, “I was excited as a sixth grader because I really love science, but would the slightly hyperactive, sports enthusiast who now is not going outside [during Advisory] be frustrated?”

As it turned out, she needn’t have worried. “I remember one boy, during the salad lesson -- everyone’s favorite lesson -- where the kids prepare the salad. The next time I went in, he had a lunch with the same salad that he asked his mom to make! He was really excited about it! He was talking about all of the different kinds of peppers that they picked out at the food market. It was really exciting because he wasn’t the type of kid that I was expecting to run home and tell his mom about a salad,” said Puttagunta.

The sixth-graders’ reaction to another lesson also surprised Puttagunta. She said, “There is one exercise where they run for a little bit, see how their heart rate changes, sit for a little bit, see how their hear rate changes, and plot it out on the graph, and they loved it! A lot of them didn’t know about these ideas so it was kind of a fascinating thing for them to see.”

Referring to her experience as a health ambassador, Puttagunta said, “It really made me appreciate what PHS was doing in terms of just how well planned it was and how it was really able to make an effect on sixth graders.” She continued, “The props were immensely helpful, especially with sixth graders. Just being able to spoon out the Crisco, they were like, ‘Eew! Gross! Look at that in my body!’ That kind of aspect is really appealing to sixth graders.”

According to Puttagunta, “The sixth-grade age group is kind of the perfect age. They are still excited about learning and really excited about this stuff. They aren’t too cool for nutrition. They are also kind of getting older so they are more independent, and parents are listening to what they say when they come home. But they are still young enough that they are still interested, excited, and passionate about these things.”

Puttagunta concluded, “I think [PHS] is a really important addition to the middle school curriculum because [most teachers] never talk about nutrition when they talk about health. They might mention ideas like, ‘fat is bad for you and you need protein,’ but they don’t really say ‘This is important because what you eat is a major determinant of your health.’”
Research indicates that healthy school environments help students achieve their full academic potential. Using the State of Michigan's Healthy School Action Tools (HSAT) is a major step toward creating those healthy school environments. PHS encourages and assists school wellness teams in completing the HSAT.

The HSAT is a suite of online tools designed to help Michigan schools and districts assess the health of their school environments and take action to improve those environments. The School Core Assessment assesses how well the school infrastructure and school culture supports a healthy school environment. To align with state goals, PHS introduces schools to the HSAT and helps them complete the School Core Assessment. Completing the assessment positions the school to be competitive for state recognition and awards.

The current version of the HSAT has been streamlined for faster completion. The School Core Assessment takes only 15 to 20 minutes to complete once the wellness team gathers all the information needed to answer the questions. As soon as a school completes the Core Assessment, they get instant access to the Action Planning Tools and all the topical area assessments.

More information about the results from PHS’ research is available in a presentation titled, “PHS Research: 10 Years in 10 Minutes,” which can be found on the PHS website.

**Highlights from 10 years of PHS research**

Since 2005, PHS’ research team, Michigan Clinical Outcomes Research and Reporting Program (MCORRP), has delivered over 85 presentations, abstracts and papers on topics related to childhood health and interventions for reducing childhood obesity. MCORRP’s most recent PHS manuscripts were published in the November issue of the American Journal of Public Health and the December issue of Childhood Obesity. Over 15,600 middle school students have participated in the research component of PHS. This large study population has contributed to the development of forty-seven abstracts, which have been presented at a multitude of prestigious national conferences.

PHS’ research has contributed to the world’s knowledge of childhood health topics, including the influence of behavioral changes, economics, gender, race and parental influence on obesity and its long-term cardiovascular risk factors. Here are a few highlights from the findings of 10 years of PHS research:

- Although students from low income communities tend to have worse behavioral and physiological measures at baseline than students from high income communities, they tend to demonstrate the most improvement post-PHS intervention.

- 15% of students reported not eating breakfast regularly. They had worse behavioral (sedentary behaviors, dietary habits and physical activity) and physiological (BMI, blood pressure, and LDL cholesterol) measures than students who regularly ate breakfast.

- Physical activity appears protective against obesity in boys, while drinking milk appears protective against obesity in girls.

- High TV viewers (passive screen time) had higher unhealthy snack consumption, blood pressure and BMI than high computer/video game users (active screen time).

PHS provides leadership for HSAT completion

Research indicates that healthy school environments help students achieve their full academic potential. Using the State of Michigan’s Healthy School Action Tools (HSAT) is a major step toward creating those healthy school environments. PHS encourages and assists school wellness teams in completing the HSAT.
AHA funds PHS camp

Last August, almost 150 kids ages 11 to 14 participated in a half day of PHS activities as part of the Ann Arbor YMCA’s week-long Community Builders Camp. The day-campers, who met at West Park in Ann Arbor, received health and wellness education including participation in hands-on PHS lessons, a discussion around “what health means to you” and creation of three-dimensional models of a healthy city. The healthy city models were shared with parents and exhibited at the YMCA.

The PHS camp program was made possible by an American Heart Association Innovation Grant and a partnership with the Ann Arbor YMCA. In January, PHS will run a two-day Community Building workshop for the Ann Arbor YMCA’s Teen After School Program which provides teens with a safe and nurturing environment where they can develop healthy relationships and learn foundational skills through the Y core values of honesty, caring, respect and responsibility.

Wellness champion gathering generates lots of ideas

PHS Wellness Champions from at least a dozen schools participated in the Fall 2015 Wellness Champion Gathering held in Ann Arbor on October 26. The half-day event included a fun icebreaker, program updates, information about the Healthy School Action Tools (HSAT), a ‘brain break’ and a discussion of the resources and tools that wellness champions want included on the new wellness champion website that PHS is developing.

The wellness champions also got a head start on planning their fall and winter wellness initiatives during a carousel-style planning exercise called, “Baby, It’s Cold Outside – Now What?” The champions were divided into small groups. Each group was assigned a month, given a planning template and told to create a wellness initiative for their assigned month. Every few minutes, the groups rotated to work on a plan started by one of the other groups. The end result was several very creative and well thought out program plans, including a turkey trot (November); 12 Days of Fitness (December); New Year, New Food (January); Love Your Heart (February) and March Madness Bracket Challenge (March).

The very interactive, high-energy workshop met the expectations of all who attended. Wellness champions, mark your calendars for the spring wellness champion gathering which is scheduled for March 21, 2016.

New PHS team at Memorial

Memorial Healthcare offers PHS to middle school students in 10 schools in the Shiawassee County region through its Memorial FIT Kids program. Memorial Healthcare recently hired Jennifer Dennis to be the on-site PHS coordinator in the schools. She reports to Memorial Healthcare’s Education Manager, Tina Coffman, R.N., M.S.N.

Dennis said, “I am very excited to be the FIT Kids Facilitator at Memorial Healthcare and work as part of the Project Healthy Schools team! I find complete joy in educating our youth.”

For Dennis, a former teacher, working with the Project Healthy Schools lessons has been a new and rewarding experience. She says, “I truly believe in living a healthy lifestyle and now I get the opportunity to share that passion with my students.”

Thank You PHS Supporters!

American Heart Association
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan
Champions for Healthy Kids (General Mills Foundation)
Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan
D. Dan and Betty Kahn Foundation
Detroit Medical Center Foundation
Memorial Healthcare Foundation
Michigan Department of Health & Human Services
Superior Health Foundation
University of Michigan Health System
UnitedHealthcare Community Plan
Wetsman Foundation

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