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?

- Nate Saulter and Maggie Maier recently joined the PHS team. Saulter is a program assistant. Maier is a wellness specialist.
- PHS was selected as the beneficiary of MHealthy’s Rivals Challenge. The eight-week physical activity challenge between faculty, staff and spouses of University of Michigan and Ohio State University runs from May 2 to June 26. Participants are asked to make a donation to PHS.
- PHS researcher, Dr. Rosa De-Visser received the Best Poster Award at the American College of Cardiology’s 65th Annual Scientific Session & Expo held in Chicago, IL in April. Her poster was titled, “Health Behaviors Predict Cardiovascular Risk Profile in Middle-School Children.”

Science of Wellness at Cody High School grows to over 90 students

The Science of Wellness program at Medicine and Community Health Academy at Cody High School in Detroit has evolved from a pilot program with a dozen students last year to three sections of an elective class reaching over 90 eleventh-grade students in the 2015-2016 school year. The program, which is made possible by a generous gift from the Wetsman Foundation, is a high school version of Project Healthy Schools (PHS) that takes a deeper look at the science behind wellness. Students are asked to use their new knowledge to engage their peers in healthier behaviors.

Each section of the Science of Wellness class meets three days a week. A priority for the class this school year is to promote healthy behaviors beyond the classroom through environmental change and engagement of the school community. The first step was forming a school wellness team to lead the way in creating a healthier school environment.

(See Science of Wellness on back page.)

PHS holds apple tastings in Flint schools

Over 1000 students at three Flint schools tried three different kinds of Michigan apples thanks to a partnership between PHS and the Michigan Apple Committee. PHS staff organized and staffed the events which took place at Brownell Elementary School, Durant-Tuuri-Mott Elementary School and Doyle Ryder Elementary in Flint during March and April.

The apple tastings were held during lunch hour. Students received slices of Jonagold, Fuji and Gala apples. A slide show about Michigan apples entertained students as they waited in line for the apples. After eating the apples, students signed a pledge to eat more fruits and vegetables and put their pledge, in the form of a paper apple, on the apple trees which will remain in the cafeteria for the remainder of the school-year as a visual reminder for students to eat fruits and vegetables every day.

Although none of these schools currently have PHS, the principals at the schools were very appreciative of the event and invited PHS to come back. PHS is looking for funding to bring the program to more schools in Flint.
PHS Activity Day a success at Allendale Middle School

Allendale Middle School, now in its second year of Building Healthy Communities: Engaging middle schools through Project Healthy Schools, held its second annual Project Healthy Schools Activity Day on March 4, 2016. Over 200 sixth-grade students participated in the half-day event. The students rotated through six activity stations then ended in the cafeteria where they received a healthy snack, prizes and awards. Wellness champion Kelly Merrill says all the kids enjoyed the event. “The kids were really excited to move along to each station. It keeps them busy. It keeps them excited. It keeps the kids moving.”

The half-day event was scheduled for the end of the trimester when the teachers have a half day for planning. During the other half of the day, from 7:48 to 11:10 a.m., the kids rotated from room to room at about 20-minute intervals to participate in each of the activities. Each sixth-grade teacher was in charge of one of the activity stations. The activity stations included:

- **Partner Step Challenge** – Each group of two students was given a pedometer and told to accumulate as many steps as possible between the two of them. They handed the pedometer back and forth every couple of minutes during the 20-minute timeframe, trying together to get as many steps as possible.

- **Move Bingo** – The students received bingo cards that listed various sports activities. If a sport listed on a student’s card was drawn the student demonstrated the motions of that sport. For example, if swimming was drawn, the students moved their arms like they were swimming.

- **Master Chef Junior** – Students watched 15 to 20 minutes of the Master Chef Junior television show in which middle-school-age kids cook high-quality meals. This activity also served as a rest station after doing a couple of the more strenuous activities.

- **Whole Grain Cracker Tasting** – Students received a brief lesson on the difference between refined grains and whole grains. Then they tasted two different types of crackers and talked about the difference in look, feel and taste of the crackers.

- **Orange Juice Experiment and Vitamin Chain** – The students dipped slices of white and whole wheat bread in orange juice to simulate the effect of stomach acid on different types of grains. (See photo below.) While they waited for the orange juice to act on the bread, they used pipe cleaners to create vitamin chains with index cards containing information about various vitamins.

- **My Plate Jeopardy** – The students formed two teams and competed against each other to answer questions from categories related to My Plate.

For other wellness champions who may want to hold an activity day at their school, Merrill has a few pointers. First, she says, “Be flexible. You want to try to get as much support as you can, so being flexible with people’s schedules and being willing to say, ‘This is the day I want, but oh, someone else has something going on so I can change it,’ is going to be really important.” Next, she says to be as organized as possible and double check everything. She even suggests, “Find another teacher that you are close to and say, ‘Hey, have I covered everything?’” And, finally, after the event, she says, “Being overly abundant with the thank yous is important as well.” Merrill held a thank you brunch for the teachers that helped with the event.

“All of my teachers have been really supportive. My administration really enjoyed the day and came to watch,” says Merrill. “I am grateful for the district I’m in because it seems like this is quite easy for us to do and I am really thankful that our students and the administration are in support and excited to do something like this.”
Environmental Changes May Improve Health Behaviors

By Rachel Sylvester

A recent study conducted by PHS’s research staff suggests environmental changes in middle schools may be critical for improving students’ health behaviors. The study analyzed health behaviors (dietary, physical activity, and sedentary habits) of students in schools that 1) had both PHS health education lessons and environmental changes, or 2) had PHS health education lessons only (i.e. no environmental changes in the school). Environmental changes included healthy habit class competitions, physical activity events such as field days or running/walking events (e.g. Turkey Trot), and the replacement of unhealthy foods and beverages in the school cafeteria and vending machines with healthier alternatives.

Compared to students who received the PHS educational lessons only (the non-environmental group), students in the environmental group had greater improvements in sugary beverage consumption, sugary/fatty food consumption, and moderate physical activity after the PHS intervention. However, environmental changes did not seem to have an effect on sedentary behaviors (e.g. television, computer, or mobile device screen time). It is possible that greater focus needs to be placed on the detrimental effects of sedentary behavior when implementing environmental changes.

Students spend many hours at school, making it an opportune venue for promoting health and curbing bad habits. By combining environmental changes in the school with the PHS educational lessons, greater improvements in diet and physical activity may be seen. These improvements in health behaviors at an early age are essential for reducing childhood obesity and future cardiovascular disease.

Powell Middle School girls’ basketball team plays at the Palace

The Powell Middle School girls’ basketball team was selected by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan (BCBSM,) out of all the Building Healthy Communities partnership schools, to participate in the January 9, 2016 birthday celebration for Hooper, the Detroit Piston’s mascot. Members of the Powell Middle School girls’ basketball team played ball on the Piston’s court at the Palace of Auburn Hills, did a photo shoot with Hooper and were part of several public service announcements that were aired during Detroit Piston’s games.

Powell Middle School joined Building Healthy Communities: Engaging Middle Schools in Project Healthy Schools in fall 2015. The program is a partnership between BCBSM, Michigan Department of Health and Human services and, University of Michigan. BCBSM was the sponsor for Hooper’s birthday celebration and used the occasion to promote A Healthier Michigan’s #MIKidsCan which is part of BCBSM’s ongoing efforts to help Michigan families make good choices leading to healthier lives. Learn more about the event at: http://www.ahealthiermichigan.org/2016/01/05/5-questions-with-detroit-pistons-mascot-hooper/
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The wellness team, open to all Cody students, teachers, and staff who are interested in promoting school health, meets bimonthly to plan health events and wellness initiatives. The first wellness team meeting was held in November during lunch time. Over 25 students attended, representing a range of ninth to twelfth graders, including many Science of Wellness students.

The initial meetings engaged students in dialogue about what wellness means to them, what wellness currently looks like at Cody, what challenges to wellness exist at Cody, and what improvements can be made.

By the end of November, the Cody wellness team brainstormed several potential school-wide wellness initiatives and events. The team prioritized the ideas and created an action plan for this school year.

In December, the Cody wellness team held their first wellness event called Four Days of Health and Wellness. Student wellness team members delivered a different health and wellness message each day to every advisory class, reaching over 300 students. The event allowed student wellness team members to share their health knowledge with their peers. The aim was to motivate the entire school community to start practicing healthy behaviors.

Wellness team members think about what wellness means to them.

Study shows poverty is more relevant than race for childhood obesity

As researchers have searched for ways to explain the childhood obesity epidemic in the U.S. many have posited that a child’s race or ethnicity alone can put them at greater risk of becoming overweight or obese.

Project Healthy Schools’ founder, Kim Eagle, a professor of internal medicine and health management and policy at the University of Michigan, was skeptical of this thinking. He believed that poverty played an important role and he saw an opportunity to investigate his hypothesis using data from Massachusetts where public health officials routinely collect race, body mass index and other data on thousands of students. Eagle and his colleagues compared these data with eligibility for the free school lunch program, an indicator of poverty, in a study which appeared in the December issue of Childhood Obesity. The study, which was discussed in an article on NPR.org, shows that poverty and not race or ethnicity can lead to obesity. Read the NPR article at: http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/01/22/463074965/why-poverty-may-be-more-relevant-than-race-for-childhood-obesity

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