

Contact: Erica Stamatoulakis
(313) 549-9884
newsroom@bcbsm.com

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Michigan schools encouraged to apply for Building Healthy Communities program *Components include mental health resources for children facing trauma, addressing absenteeism*

DETROIT, April 28, 2022 — Michigan K-12 schools are invited to apply for *Building Healthy Communities (BHC)*, a public-private school-based initiative that supports children’s whole health by providing teachers, administrators and students the resources, curriculum, equipment and professional development to create healthier school environments, prevent childhood obesity, reduce chronic disease, improve academic achievement, reduce absenteeism and address mental health and well-being. More than 200 schools are participating in the program this academic year, reaching over 90,000 students in Michigan.

Three programs are available through *Building Healthy Communities* to help meet the needs of Michigan schools for the 2022-2023 school year, which include:

- *Building Healthy Communities: Reducing Health Disparities in Elementary Schools* is focused on addressing the social determinants of health that have contributed to wide disparities in many communities across Michigan and implements the program in all elementary school buildings within a school district simultaneously.
- *Building Healthy Communities: Engaging Middle Schools through Project Healthy Schools* creates a culture of wellness enabling middle school students to increase physical activity, eat healthier, improve mental health, and understand, through classroom lessons specifically targeting 6th graders, how nutrition, activity and well-being influence their lifelong health and learning.
- *Building Healthy Communities: Step Up for School Wellness* is flexible to meet the diverse needs of school buildings across the state. This program provides a menu of nutrition, physical activity and well-being resources that schools can choose one or more from to make their school environment healthier and create a culture of wellness.

“The *Building Healthy Communities* program is at the core of Blue Cross’ social mission to improve the health of all Michiganders, especially our children,” said Ken Hayward, vice president and special assistant to the president for Community Relations at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. “We are joined by a group of dedicated partners committed to ensuring schools have the proper support and resources to improve children’s physical and mental health.”

Launched in 2009, *BHC* is supported by multiple statewide organizations, including Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, Michigan Department of Education, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association (MEMSPA), Michigan Health Endowment Fund, Michigan Fitness Foundation, Michigan Recreation and Park Association, Michigan State University Extension, Michigan Virtual, SHAPE Michigan, TRAILS, United Dairy Industry of Michigan, the University of Michigan and Wayne State University Center for Health and Community Impact.

“The Health Fund is committed to reducing health disparities in Michigan, and especially for our youngest Michiganders. We're proud to partner with BCBSM and other funders to support Building Healthy Communities and empower more Michigan residents to live their healthiest lives,” said Jan Delatorre, program officer at the Michigan Health Endowment Fund.

“Michigan schools participating in the Building Healthy Communities: Step Up for School Wellness program are thriving as they mindfully build their culture of well-being each year through our program,” said Paul Liabenow, executive director of MEMSPA. “Partnering organizations have aligned under Step Up for School Wellness for greater collective impact and, together, we will continue to meet the unique needs of all schools and help students and staff develop lifelong healthy behaviors that reduce the incidence of obesity and undernourishment, combat absenteeism, address trauma, focus on self-care, improve teacher retention, and nurture a more productive teaching and learning atmosphere.”

“Schools play a critical role in supporting Michigan’s children to succeed and lead healthy lives,” said Dr. Natasha Bagdasarian, chief medical executive at MDHHS. “This partnership offers valuable resources to schools to assist them in helping students learn more about healthy habits including physical activity, good nutrition and their mental health and well-being.”

"The past two years have had a significant impact on the physical, mental, and educational health of young people, especially those who live in Michigan's most underserved communities. The elementary Building Healthy Communities program is proud to work alongside committed partners to meaningfully address the health and social disparities that will impact children’s wellbeing, now and in the future," said Dr. Nate McCaughtry, director of the Center for Health and Community Impact and Assistant Dean of the Division of Kinesiology, Health and Sport Studies at Wayne State University.

“The University of Michigan is excited for another year of partnership with Building Healthy Communities. The past two years have shown the ongoing commitment of the program to the health and well-being of middle school students across the state of Michigan, and I am continually amazed by the dedication of our team and of all the Building Healthy Communities partners, especially as schools navigated through the COVID-19 pandemic. We are looking forward to sharing these opportunities and working alongside our new middle schools to support cultures of wellness and life-long health and learning for all students,” said Kim A. Eagle, MD, co-founder of Project Healthy Schools, Albion Walter Hewlett Professor of Internal Medicine Director, Frankel Cardiovascular Center.

“We are proud and thankful that the Building Healthy Communities program continues to support the whole health of nearly 100,000 students statewide,” said Dr. Diane Golzynski, director of the Office of Health and Nutrition Services at the Michigan Department of Education. “This public-private initiative is especially important because it's aligned with key underpinnings of Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan – especially Goal 3 to improve the health, safety, and wellness of all learners. We must continue striving to ensure that the essential needs of Michigan’s children are met.”

Cortney Freeland, director of Youth Wellness Programs at the United Dairy Industry of Michigan, said, “UDIM is proud to partner with the Building Healthy Communities program. As a long-time advocate of child nutrition and wellness, being a part of an initiative that supports the overall well-being of children is important to our organization. On behalf of Michigan Dairy Farmers, we take pride in doing our part by working with Michigan schools to share nutrition education and ensure children have access to and are fueled daily with nutrient-rich dairy foods.”

“Building Healthy Communities offers valuable resources that support teachers in their mission to promote healthy, active lifestyles. Participation in this awesome program is a game-changer for teachers, students, communities and, ultimately, the health of Michigan,” said Dr. Debra S. Berkey, executive director of SHAPE-Michigan.

All public, charter and private nonprofit schools in the state are encouraged to review the full program description and eligibility information at www.bcbsm.com/buildhealth. Applications are currently being accepted for the *Building Healthy Communities: Step Up for School Wellness Program* and *Building Healthy Communities: Engaging Middle Schools through Project Healthy Schools*.

- *Building Healthy Communities: Step Up for School Wellness* – Applications will be accepted through 5 p.m. on June 30, 2022 at buildinghealthycommunities.arewehealthy.com.
- *Building Healthy Communities: Engaging Middle Schools through Project Healthy Schools* – Applications will be accepted through 5 p.m. on August 26, 2022 at <https://projecthealthyschools.org/building-healthy-communities>.

Building Healthy Communities supports Blue Cross’ ongoing commitment to children’s health and its #MIKidsCan campaign – an initiative focused on encouraging kids to adopt healthy habits early in life that are more likely to be carried into adulthood. Since its inception, *BHC* has supported 469,000 students and 1,100 schools statewide. For more information on Blue Cross’ ongoing efforts to help improve childhood health, visit AHealthierMichigan.org/MIKidsCan.

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