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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Building Healthy Communities program now available for Michigan schools to apply for the 2023-2024 school year

Over a half-million students impacted since 2009

DETROIT, April 10, 2023 — Michigan K-12 schools are invited to apply for *Building Healthy Communities (BHC)*, a comprehensive school health program focused on facilitating critical changes to the school environment to support physical and mental health of students and staff. Over 200 schools are participating in the program this current academic year, impacting the lives of nearly 100,000 students in Michigan.

Established in 2009, the *Building Healthy Communities* program continues to engage leading health and wellness organizations to provide schools with evidence-based and sustainable equipment, training and curriculum curated to meet the ongoing needs and challenges within Michigan schools. The program aims to create healthier school environments and, in turn, prevent childhood obesity, reduce chronic disease, improve academic achievement and address mental health and well-being.

The following programs are available through *Building Healthy Communities* to help meet the needs of Michigan schools for the 2023-2024 school year, including:

- *Building Healthy Communities: Reducing Health Disparities in Elementary Schools*, 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*, which creates a culture of wellness enabling middle school students to increase physical activity, eat healthier, and improve and understand mental health through classroom lessons specifically targeting 6th graders.
- *Building Healthy Communities: Step Up for School Wellness*, flexible to meet the diverse needs of school buildings across the state. This program provides a menu of healthy eating, 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.

“We’ve seen the wide-ranging impact *Building Healthy Communities* has had on Michigan schools and children,” said Ken Hayward, vice president and special assistant to the president for Community Relations at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. “Reaching over a half-million students since BHC began is a not only a

massive milestone in itself, but also most importantly we're proud to be leading children on a path of building healthier lives. Our work continues in ensuring all Michigan schools have this opportunity to create cultures of wellness within their local communities."

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 Fitness Foundation, Michigan Recreation and Park Association, Michigan State University Extension, Michigan Virtual, OK2SAY, SHAPE Michigan, United Dairy Industry of Michigan, the University of Michigan and Wayne State University Center for Health and Community Impact.

"MEMSPA is proud to be part of this collaborative process to improve both well-being and student achievement," said Paul Liabenow, executive director of MEMSPA. "The *Building Healthy Communities* initiative and the Step Up for School Wellness program continues to empower Michigan schools to make changes to their environment, policies, and systems, and build a sustainable culture of well-being for both students and staff. The positive program outcomes and behavioral impacts support lifelong healthy behaviors and nurture a more productive teaching and learning environment."

"Learning the importance of being physically active and how to make informed food choices at a young age can lead to healthy benefits throughout a person's lifetime," said Dr. Natasha Bagdasarian, chief medical executive at MDHHS. "We are proud to be partnering with and supporting so many Michigan schools in creating a culture that reduces the risk of chronic disease, promotes overall health and supports academic achievement."

"For more than a decade, the elementary *Building Healthy Communities* program has been proud to work with likeminded partners to promote health equity for schoolchildren across Michigan," said Dr. Nate McCaughtry, director for the Center for Health and Community Impact and Assistant Dean of the Division of Kinesiology, Health and Sport Studies at Wayne State University. "This year, we're looking forward to working in school districts to increase children's health enhancing physical activity, improve healthy eating, reduce and prevent childhood obesity, and enhance academic achievement, leading to long-lasting impacts for families and communities."

"Project Healthy Schools is looking forward to our continued partnership with Building Healthy Communities for the 2023-2024 school year in our new middle schools across the state," said Kim A. Eagle, MD, co-founder of Project Healthy Schools, Albion Walter Hewlett Professor of Internal Medicine Director, Frankel Cardiovascular Center. "The success of *BHC* as a program is a testament to all the organizations who continue to strive to create healthier school environments and improve health and academic outcomes for all Michigan students. As we continue to work through the impact that COVID-19 has had on Michigan schools and communities, we are committed to providing the most beneficial program and resources for all participating schools. This year, we are thrilled to be expand our reach into school buildings and communities

where we can continue to engage with students, teachers, staff and families through physical activity, nutrition, and social emotional knowledge and skill-based education.”

“Comprehensive programs such as *Building Healthy Communities* play a critical role in helping Michigan achieve the goal 3 of the Strategic Education Plan for improving the health, safety, and wellness of students,” said Dr. Diane Golzynski, Interim Deputy Superintendent for Finance and Operations at the Michigan Department of Education (MDE). “MDE is excited to continue our partnership and support of this critical program.”

“United Dairy Industry of Michigan is proud to be a part of a partnership and program that fully aligns with our health and wellness goals,” said Brianna Henton, MS, RDN, health and wellness director at United Dairy Industry of Michigan. “Creating healthier school environments through nutrition education and by ensuring dairy and other nutritious foods are accessible daily to our students results in a life-changing impact on their well-being and in the classroom.”

“OK2SAY, Michigan's student safety tipline, is pleased to be a part of BHC's initiative, which brings together various organizations and interest groups with a shared vision to improve the lives and enhance the safety of Michigan's children,” said Ms. Kim Root, section manager of the Office of School Safety in the Michigan State Police.

“The *Building Healthy Communities* program has provided essential support to the well-being of educators and students,” said Stacey Schuh, senior director of professional learning services at Michigan Virtual. “We are proud to partner with MEMSPA and Blue Cross to bring this training to school districts across Michigan.”

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

All public, charter and private nonprofit schools in the state are encouraged to review the full program descriptions and eligibility information at www.bcbsm.com/buildhealth.

- *Building Healthy Communities: Step Up for School Wellness* – Applications will be accepted through 5 p.m. on June 30, 2023, at buildinghealthycommunities.arewehealthy.com.
- *Building Healthy Communities: Engaging Middle Schools through Project Healthy Schools* – Applications are anticipated to be available on April 15, 2023 and will be accepted through 5 p.m. on June 30, 2023 at <https://projecthealthyschools.org/building-healthy-communities>.
- *Building Healthy Communities: Reducing Health Disparities in Elementary Schools* – Is currently recruiting school districts with the highest indicators of disparities across the state. If your district is interested in receiving the program, please visit <https://bhcwsu.org/our-program/application-procedures/> and complete the application before June 30, 2023.

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 over 500,000 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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Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, a nonprofit mutual insurance company, is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. BCBSM provides health benefits to more than 4.7 million members residing in Michigan in addition to employees of Michigan-headquartered companies residing outside the state. The company has been committed to delivering affordable health care products through a broad variety of plans for businesses, individuals and seniors for more than 80 years. Beyond health care coverage, BCBSM supports impactful community initiatives and provides leadership in improving health care. For more information, visit bcbsm.com and MiBluesPerspectives.com.