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Calling All Michigan Schools: Building Healthy Communities Program Opens Applications for the 2024-2025 School Year

More than a half-million students impacted since 2009

DETROIT, April 2, 2024 — Michigan K-12 schools are invited to apply for *Building Healthy Communities*, a comprehensive school health program focused on facilitating critical changes to the school environment to support physical and mental health of students and staff. Nearly 150 schools are participating in the program this current academic year, impacting the lives of more than 62,000 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, reduce childhood obesity, prevent chronic disease, improve academic achievement and address mental health and well-being. *Building Healthy Communities* strives to support students of all abilities and learning types, designing the program to be inclusive in supporting their physical and mental health.

New resources are available through the program this year, which include:

- **Physical Activity Breaks** - *InPACT* (Interrupting Prolonged sitting with ACTivity) is a classroom-based physical activity program designed to incorporate 4-minute exercise snacks into daily routines. The resource provides teachers with the necessary tools and instruction to lead their classes in short activity breaks throughout the school day to help prime the brain for learning and regulate student emotions. Classroom activity breaks also energize and motivate students to be physically active.
- **Better With Breakfast** - Research shows breakfast is crucial for students' learning and overall well-being. The simple act of eating school breakfast can transform a child's life, leading to higher test scores, calmer classrooms, fewer trips to the nurse's office, and higher attendance and graduation rates. *Building Healthy Communities* offers resources to help schools provide breakfast in varied ways – outside the cafeteria, in hallways or classrooms,

or between periods – to help boost student participation. Schools have unique needs, so the program encourages schools to explore different breakfast service models to identify what works best for students and staff.

“The *Building Healthy Communities* program impacts thousands of Michigan students year after year, encouraging them to live healthy lives,” said Ken Hayward, vice president and special assistant to the president for Community Relations at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. “Throughout the 15 years of the program, we’ve seen distinct improvements in academic achievement, nutrition, and physical activity behaviors of participating students, and we continue to seek innovative ways to enhance the resources we provide. We’re proud of the mark this program is leaving on the next generation and look forward to seeing how *Building Healthy Communities* continues to create cultures of wellness across Michigan.”

Building Healthy Communities 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.

“We are proud to support Michigan schools in making the healthy choice the easy choice,” said Elizabeth Hertel, MDHHS director. “Empowering students and teachers to make healthy choices, including eating healthier and being more physically active every day, sets them up for lifelong healthy habits and academic success.”

“Supporting Michigan students with healthy eating and physical activity aligns with goal three of the Michigan Strategic Education Plan,” says Dr. Diane Golzynski, deputy superintendent for the Business, Health, and Library Services division at the Michigan Department of Education. “The *Building Healthy Communities* program has been a mainstay since 2009 and we are proud to support these efforts statewide.”

“Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principal’s Association and our network of school leaders have a shared vision that prioritizes the well-being of students and staff through policy, systems and environmental improvements. The *Building Healthy Communities: Step Up for School Wellness* program supports this vision by allowing Michigan schools to customize program resources they receive, determine their implementation pace, thoughtfully develop health goals, and reapply to add new

resources,” said Paul Liabenow, executive director of MEMSPA. "This program model is brilliant, sustainable and positively impacts health behaviors. We are proud to be included in this initiative!"

“On behalf of Michigan’s dairy farm families, United Dairy Industry of Michigan is proud to support the *Building Healthy Communities* program alongside its many partners. As a longtime advocate of child nutrition and wellness, being part of this initiative that addresses overall student health in the school environment is important to our organization,” said Amiee Vondrasek, Health and Wellness senior manager, United Dairy Industry of Michigan. “Michigan’s dairy farmers are proud to help provide a foundation of nutrition education and increase student access to dairy and other nutritious foods each day at school.”

"The *Building Healthy Communities* program is looking forward to expanding our established track record of helping students improve their health and well-being," said Dr. Nate McCaughtry, assistant dean and professor in the division of Kinesiology, Health and Sport Studies, and the director of the Center for Health and Community Impact at Wayne State University. "Beyond fostering better nutritional habits and promoting increased physical activity among individual students, our work helps to address systemic disparities that affect the overall health of communities and empowers schools and families to cultivate environments where young people can truly thrive."

“Project Healthy Schools is looking forward to our continued partnership with *Building Healthy Communities* for the 2024-2025 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 and director, Frankel Cardiovascular Center at the University of Michigan. “The success of *Building Healthy Communities* 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, and we are committed to providing the most beneficial program and up-to-date resources for all participating schools. We are excited for the opportunity to 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.”

“Right now, less than half of Michigan students get the recommended 60 minutes of daily exercise. This means they're more likely to have problems like being overweight, feeling anxious or sad, missing school, and not doing as well in their classes. We're excited to introduce InPACT to more schools across Michigan to help make our students healthier and happier.” said Rebecca Hasson, Ph.D., associate professor, University of Michigan School of Kinesiology.

“OK2SAY, Michigan's Student Safety Tipline, is delighted to be a part of *the Building Healthy Communities program*, which brings together various organizations and interest groups to help improve the safety and quality of life for students in Michigan,” said Ms. Kim Root, section manager of the Office of School Safety in the Michigan State Police.

“In today's ever-changing world, fostering a supportive and safe school environment is essential. The *Building Healthy Communities* program has touched countless lives across our state, and we at Michigan Virtual are deeply honored to contribute to this impactful work,” said Jamey Fitzpatrick, president at Michigan Virtual.

“Using Moderate to Vigorous Activity (MVPA) as a metric, teachers can gauge effectiveness of their programs and students can learn how to monitor their activity levels to optimize their performance. *Building Healthy Communities* provides equipment and training that has immediate impact in schools and influences long-term lifestyle choices among students,” said Dr. Deb Berkey, professor-emerita, Western Michigan University and executive director of SHAPE-Michigan.

All public, charter and private nonprofit schools in the state are encouraged to review the full program descriptions and eligibility information at <https://www.bcbsm.com/buildhealth>. Applications for all programs are due on June 30, 2024.

- ***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. Apply at buildinghealthycommunities.arenwehealthy.com.
- ***Engaging Middle Schools through Project Healthy Schools*** –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. Applications can be found at <https://projecthealthyschools.org/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. If your district is interested in receiving the program, please visit <https://bhcwsu.org/our-program/application-procedures/>.

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, *Building Healthy Communities* has impacted over 538,000 students and 1,200 schools statewide. For more information on Blue Cross' ongoing efforts to help improve childhood health, visit AHealthierMichigan.org/MIKidsCan.

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