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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Empowering Michigan Schools: Building Healthy Communities Program Seeks Participants for 2025-2026 School Year**

*More than a half-million students influenced by school health program since 2009*

**DETROIT, March 10, 2025** — *Building Healthy Communities*, a successful school health program established in 2009, is now accepting applications from K-12 Michigan schools for the upcoming academic year. This program focuses on creating a healthier school environment to support the physical and mental well-being of both students and staff. With more than 1,000 Michigan schools currently participating, the program has already positively impacted the lives of over 500,000 students.

The *Building Healthy Communities* program is proudly supported by leading health and wellness organizations dedicated to understanding and addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by Michigan schools. Evidence-based, sustainable equipment, training and curriculum are tailored to these needs, aiming to foster academic achievement and promote student mental health and well-being. A primary focus of *Building Healthy Communities* is supporting students of all abilities and learning types. The program is designed to be inclusive, ensuring that the physical and mental health of every student, from diverse learning styles to various physical abilities, is cared for and nurtured.

"The *Building Healthy Communities* program has positively impacted countless students in Michigan year after year, encouraging them to adopt and sustain healthy lifestyles," said Tiffany Albert, vice president of Community Relations at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. "Over the 16 years of this program, we have seen significant improvements in the academic performance, dietary choices and physical activity levels of participating students. We are excited about the lasting effects this program is having on the next generation, while also contributing to greater healthcare affordability for the future."

Multiple statewide organizations support the *Building Healthy Communities* program 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.

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>.

- ***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.arewehealthy.com](https://buildinghealthycommunities.arewehealthy.com). Applications are due May 30, 2025.
- ***Engaging Middle Schools through Project Healthy Schools*** – Creates a culture of wellness that educates and supports middle school students and staff to increase healthy eating, physical activity, cardiovascular health, and social emotional learning, through wellness events that impact the entire school community and hands-on classroom lessons specifically targeting 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, or 7<sup>th</sup> grade students. Applications can be found at <https://projecthealthyschools.org/apply-now/>. Applications are due April 30, 2025.
- ***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/>. Applications are due May 30, 2025.

"Creating a culture of health in Michigan schools is something we are proud to support," said Elizabeth Hertel, MDHHS director. "Adopting healthy eating habits and regular physical activity can help students achieve and maintain a healthy weight, lower risk of chronic diseases, enhance overall well-being and support academic success."

"This work directly supports [Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan](#) goal 3 in that it supports the health, safety, and wellness of all learners. Supporting all students has a direct positive impact on academic outcomes and MDE is proud to partner with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan on this project," said Dr. Diane Golzynski, deputy superintendent for the Business, Health, and Library Services division at the Michigan Department of Education.

"Michigan's dairy farm families are committed to creating healthier school environments, which is why we proudly support the *Building Healthy Communities* program. By ensuring students have access to nutritious foods – including dairy – we're helping them fuel their bodies, focus in the classroom and build lifelong healthy habits," said Amiee Vondrasek, Health & Wellness senior manager, United Dairy

Industry of Michigan. “By working together, we can empower students to make healthier choices every day.”

"The Building Healthy Communities program has long been dedicated to collaborating with partners who share our mission of advancing health equity for students throughout 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 excited to continue our work with school districts, focusing on promoting active lifestyles and more nutritious eating habits, fostering positive mental health, combating childhood obesity and supporting academic success—all of which will create lasting benefits for students, families and communities."

"For 16 years, we have been privileged to work alongside Blue Cross Blue Shield's *Building Healthy Communities* in delivering health programming to middle school students in our state. Our Project Healthy Schools program at University of Michigan Health has dovetailed beautifully with both the programs and collaborators across the state. There is no greater service that we can provide in our state beyond enabling better health for our youth. For our entire PHS team, congratulations to Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan for being a steady leader in this critical service," 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.

"Now more than ever, we recognize the importance of fostering healthy habits and equipping students with the tools they need for academic success," said Kimberly Gillow, associate executive director of Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principal Association. "*Building Healthy Communities* is driving positive change and empowering students to thrive in Michigan's schools. As we move into the 2025-2026 school year, our commitment to creating supportive environments that prioritize both physical and mental health for our students remains strong. This program continues to prove that investing in the well-being of our young people is an investment in the future of our entire state."

"We are committed to ensuring that every child in Michigan has access to the physical activity they need to thrive—both academically and personally. Through our partnership with *Building Healthy Communities*, we are empowering schools with evidence-based strategies that make movement an integral part of the school day. Together, we are creating inclusive, active learning environments that support the physical and mental well-being of all students," said Rebecca Hasson, Ph.D., associate professor, University of Michigan School of Kinesiology.

“OK2SAY, Michigan’s student safety program, is proud to support this vital initiative, uniting a diverse coalition of organizations and stakeholders in a shared mission to provide schools with essential resources and effective strategies that foster student and family well-being,” said Ms. Kim Root, section manager of the Office of School Safety in the Michigan State Police. “This evidence-based program has a proven track record of driving positive change, significantly strengthening the health, safety, and overall success of students across our state.”

“*Building Healthy Communities* is a comprehensive wellness opportunity that Michigan Virtual encourages schools to apply for and leverage for healthy students,” said Walt Sutterlin, senior director of Strategic Communications, Marketing & Partnerships at Michigan Virtual.

“Empowering Michigan Schools: Building Healthy Communities is a valuable asset to schools seeking to support the development of the whole child. SHAPE Michigan is proud to be a partner in this effort to facilitate healthy, active lifestyles for Michigan students,” said Dr. Deb Berkey, professor-emerita, Western Michigan University and executive director of SHAPE-Michigan. “

For nearly a decade, mParks Come Out and Play curriculum has been a critical part of improving the physical health of Michigan’s youth,” said Nichole Fisher, Executive Director of mParks. “The *Building Healthy Communities* program continues to be a conduit of health by making the program accessible to our school-aged kids.”

*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. For more information on Blue Cross’ ongoing efforts to help improve childhood health, visit [AHealthierMichigan.org/MIKidsCan](https://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](https://bcbsm.com) and [MiBlueDaily.com](https://MiBlueDaily.com).*