

# 2025-2026

## Request for Applications

Applications due: April 30, 2025

### BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Engaging Middle Schools through  
Project Healthy Schools



Apply at <https://projecthealthyschools.org/apply-now/>.\*

Find more information at [bcbsm.com/buildhealth](http://bcbsm.com/buildhealth).

## Introduction

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, United Dairy Industry of Michigan and the University of Michigan invite Michigan middle schools to apply for the 2025-2026 Building Healthy Communities: Engaging Middle Schools through Project Healthy Schools program.

The program recognizes that Michigan schools, students and staff continue to need physical, mental and emotional health support. This program is helping meet these needs by encouraging a whole-child approach to health, while recognizing the unique needs of every school community across the state. This includes a variety of instructional options that meet the needs of both in-person and virtual learning environments, as well as a flexible implementation model that allows your school to prioritize investments in areas of need such as mental health, self-care and physical activity resources.

Building Healthy Communities: Engaging Middle Schools through Project Healthy Schools partners with schools to champion a sustainable culture of wellness throughout the school's community. Through education, policy and environmental change, this program tailors health and wellness initiatives to the unique needs of each school. Healthy habits start young, and this program helps establish the knowledge and behaviors needed for a healthy lifestyle that lasts a lifetime.

A Building Healthy Communities: Engaging Middle Schools through Project Healthy Schools wellness coordinator will lead your school's wellness champion and school community through an annual five-step approach to build and sustain a culture of wellness. Every school that participates in BHC: PHS will be required to form and sustain a school wellness team that is supported and advised by your wellness coordinator. This team will assess the needs and strengths of their school building to identify SMART goals and actions that promote a healthy school culture. This team will help implement the program offerings that best support your school's goals.

### **The goals of the program are for students to:**

- Consume a variety of healthy foods and beverages.
- Be physically active every day.
- Engage in healthy behaviors to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Research validates a clear connection between positive health behaviors and academic performance. Building Healthy Communities: Engaging Middle Schools through Project Healthy Schools helps establish a healthy school environment that supports higher levels of academic achievement by:

- Building support for a culture of school wellness throughout the whole school community through family engagement activities, and health and wellness information and resources
- Assessing the current school environment for health and wellness and utilizing a data-driven approach to policy, systems and environmental change initiatives to cultivate a culture of wellness throughout the whole school community
- Providing a variety of learning opportunities through a 10-lesson, evidence-based curriculum on nutrition and physical activity, with new topic areas of screen time, caffeine, sleep hygiene, vaping/tobacco, and dental health, curriculum on social and emotional learning, a professional development conference (from which teachers can earn SCECHs) and staff self-care trainings
- Utilizing a personalized approach to establishing or supporting before or after school health and wellness programs for students and staff that leverage school, community-based or University of Michigan programs and resources
- Fostering a culture of wellness that promotes diversity, equity and inclusion. Educational offerings and wellness initiatives and programs have been designed to be culturally inclusive and developmentally appropriate for all students
- Providing a multitude of opportunities to improve student connectedness at school through engaging curriculum, opportunities for healthy nutrition and physical activity, and promotion of a welcoming and inclusive school environment. Research indicates that when students feel more connected to their school, they have higher rates of attendance, which leads to improved academic and health outcomes



## Program highlights and enhanced focus

- **Staff wellness:** Your school will have access to a staff wellness program with surveys, funding support, programs and resources and self-care trainings.
- **Social and emotional wellness of students:** Students will be provided with concentrated programming to develop and nurture social and emotional wellness and address trauma. Participating BHC: PHS schools will be provided training and Social Emotional Health curriculum through the Michigan Model for Health™.
- **School safety:** The BHC: PHS team is working with the Michigan School Safety Initiative to provide schools with evidence-based resources.
- **Before and after school programs:** All schools will be offered support to provide safe and health-focused programs tailored to their students that offer healthy eating, a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program and health-based academic enrichment programs (cooking clubs, biking clubs, open gym, before school breakfast).
- **Community outreach and family engagement:** The BHC: PHS enhanced virtual platform offers tools and community resources to engage families at home.
- **Belonging and student development:** Schools will have access to a guest speaker series to provide in-person and virtual presentations of various health topics that highlight speakers of different races, ethnicities, genders and backgrounds. In addition, an all-inclusive adaptive sports curriculum to support all physical education classes created by U-M adaptive experts is offered to schools.
- **School nutrition environment:** In partnership with the United Dairy Industry of Michigan, participating food service leaders will receive resources and support to examine their school food systems and identify opportunities for enhanced operations, including:
  - Direct guidance and support from the United Dairy Industry of Michigan
  - On-site and virtual support to assess the current food service program, identify potential areas for enhancement and implementation strategies to improve operations
  - Equipment, resources and other supports to implement the identified enhancements to the school food system and environment
- **Wellness Champion Portal:** Participating BHC: PHS schools have access to a private portal that houses all lesson plans, resources and additional support.
- **School wellness teams:** All participating BHC: PHS schools are required to have an active school wellness team. The program provides technical assistance and resources to convene a sustainable school wellness team.

## Proven results for students



Engaged in more moderate to vigorous physical activity



Decreased sedentary time, which included reducing television viewing and video game playing



Increased fruit and vegetable consumption



Decreased unhealthy snack consumption



# 5 steps to school wellness

Building Healthy Communities: Engaging Middle Schools through Project Healthy Schools wellness coordinators provide on-site, remote and electronic support to assist the school wellness champions and wellness team throughout the program implementation process. This includes implementing the five-step process that lays the groundwork for continued success and sustainability of a healthy school culture.

## 5 steps to school wellness

## Expectations for schools

### 1. Build support

- **Identify one or more school wellness champions** — The wellness champion, a staff member with an interest in health promotion, maintains regular communication with the Project Healthy Schools coordinator to learn how to implement the program, transitioning to full responsibility for the program by the end of the first year.
- **Form a school wellness team** — A school wellness team is a collaborative group committed to improving the health, wellness and academic achievement of the students. The goal of the wellness team is to assist the wellness champion in creating a healthy school environment by meeting regularly to assist with the implementation of the school's action plan. Schools will be required to host a minimum of four wellness team meetings during the first year of the program.
- **Engage your community** — Schools will share health and wellness information and program activities through a variety of communication channels, as well as display the provided program banner and health promotion bulletin board materials, rotating content throughout the school year.

### 2. Assess school wellness culture

- **Administer the preprogram questionnaire and survey** — All students who receive the Project Healthy Schools lessons must complete the Health Behavior questionnaire prior to starting the lessons.
- **Complete the Healthy School Action Tools** — During the first year of the program, school wellness teams will complete Healthy School Action Tools, or HSAT, to assess the environment at your school with assistance from the Project Healthy Schools wellness coordinator.
- **Engage with the United Dairy Industry of Michigan** — All participating schools have the opportunity to meet with a representative from UDIM to assess their nutrition environment. To be eligible for this support, schools must participate in the USDA's National School Breakfast and School Lunch Program.

### 3. Make an action plan

- **Analyze the assessment results** — After completing the HSAT, review the scorecard with a BHC: PHS wellness coordinator to identify wellness needs within the school community.
- **Identify S.M.A.R.T. goals** — Create four schoolwide SMART goals to improve the nutritional and physical activity environment for students, staff wellness and other areas of need within the school community related to health and wellness.
- **Create an action plan** — Explore all the offerings available from the program to tailor your approach and complete your action plan, which will include a minimum of four schoolwide initiatives that improve your school's health policies, systems or environment.

## 4. Take action

- **Teach 10 Project Healthy Schools lessons** — The curriculum for the 10 Project Healthy Schools lessons emphasizes the five program goals. All fifth, sixth or seventh grade students will receive the 10 lessons from teachers trained in their delivery. All the lesson materials will be provided by the BHC: PHS program and maintained by the school.
- **Teach the MMH Social Emotional Health lessons** — The SEL curriculum delivered to students in sixth, seventh and eighth grades emphasizes student self-care and coping strategies. Teachers receive training prior to lesson delivery and receive ongoing support.
- **Implement schoolwide wellness initiatives** — Schools are expected to plan at least four sustainable policy, systems or environmental change initiatives based on the S.M.A.R.T. goals identified through the school assessment data.

Some examples of initiatives that have been implemented in partner schools include:

- Wellness policy updates
- Restructuring PBIS celebrations to include healthy snacks and activities that promote physical activity
- Team-oriented staff healthy habits wellness challenges
- Student garden clubs
- Incorporation of playground zones that encourage students to be more physically active throughout the school day
- Before or after school nutrition or physical activity enrichment programs

Your Project Healthy Schools wellness coordinator will provide on-site and remote support with planning, implementing and funding these wellness initiatives.

## 5. Measure success

- **Administer post-program questionnaire** — Schools will administer the online post-program Health Behavior Questionnaire to all students who receive the nutritional and physical activity educational lessons.
- **Complete the post-lesson surveys** — Schools will support the administration of surveys for teachers and students regarding their satisfaction with the nutrition, physical activity and SEL lessons.
- **Share photos and success stories** — Schools will share examples of program impact and celebrate their wellness efforts by sharing schoolwide success stories through various communication channels, including social media.

\*\*The measurement component is used to understand the health behaviors of the students, ensure the quality of the program and highlight opportunities for improvement. This information is also useful for planning and setting goals for the following year. All data will be kept confidential, and individual students won't be identified.

## Resources in the first year

- **On-site wellness coordinator** — A hands-on Project Healthy Schools wellness coordinator will make regular contact with your school through on-site visits and electronic communication to:
  - Train the school wellness champions.
  - Provide training, support and materials for delivering the lessons.
  - Assist the wellness champions and wellness team in completing an environmental assessment using the Healthy School Action Tools.
  - Assist the wellness team in developing schoolwide wellness goals and an action plan that addresses specific school needs and gaps in area resources. Your coordinator will provide expertise in considering how the social determinants of health influence well-being in your building, and related strategies to reduce poor health outcomes.
  - Help facilitate policy, systems and environmental change initiatives to cultivate a culture of wellness throughout the whole school community related to nutrition, physical activity, staff wellness and emotional wellness.
  - Provide your school’s wellness team with a flexible funding model, which assists with putting your school’s wellness goals into action. Wellness initiatives that target gaps in your school offerings, such as before or after school programming, or that target social determinants of health, such as the built environment, will utilize these first-year funds to invest in your building’s needs.
  - Assist in forming food service and community partnerships.
  - Provide additional funding and support to assist with the development of a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program. For example, you may identify a lack of physical activity in before or after school programs and elect to establish new programs or implement strategies into existing programs such as open gym, walking programs, other exercise opportunities or similar offerings recommended by your coordinator.
  - Work with the wellness team to identify resources to sustain the program.
- **Educational lessons** — The program includes results-driven, evidence-based curriculums founded in best practices and aligned with state health education standards focused on nutrition, physical activity and social emotional health.
  1. The 10 physical activity and nutrition lessons are delivered to students in fifth, sixth or seventh grade and include:
    - Training prior to and support throughout lesson delivery
    - A written lesson plan with step-by-step instructions for traditional in-class delivery or synchronous remote delivery
    - PowerPoint or Google slides to help facilitate instruction
    - Props and equipment for all learning activities
    - Additional enrichment activities and lesson extensions
    - A caregiver packet with family engagement activities
    - Access to other lesson plan topics areas include screen time, caffeine consumption, sleep hygiene, vaping/tobacco and dental health
  2. The social emotional health lessons from the Michigan Model for Health™ focusing on student self-care and effective coping strategies are delivered to each grade level and include:
    - Training for classroom educators and support for staff on delivery of the curricula



- **Tools and resources** — The program will provide:
  - Funding for equipment and supplies to support your sustainable policy, systems and environmental change wellness initiatives and programs
  - Online access to lesson materials and other resources through the password-protected Project Healthy Schools portal
  - Customized ideas, descriptions, instructions and examples for how to execute a wide range of wellness initiatives that address your school’s wellness culture and social determinants of health
  - Assessment tools, including the Healthy School Action Tools
  - A health behavior questionnaire and program surveys to measure success
  - Professional development opportunities from which educators can receive State Continuing Education Clock Hours. Topics may include student or staff mental health, best practices in nutrition and physical education classrooms, strategies for cultivating an inclusive classroom and guidance on integrating students with different physical or mental ability levels
  - Health promotion and program marketing materials for use throughout the school year
  - Information about how to access additional public resources, wellness grants and awards
- **Wellness champion network** — Project Healthy Schools wellness champions can network with dozens of wellness champions from across the state through the Project Healthy Schools Portal and wellness champion gatherings. This provides wellness champions with the opportunity to earn continuing education hours, share ideas, learn best practices, ask questions and share success stories.

## Resources in the second year and beyond

After the first year, responsibility for the program transitions to the school wellness champions and wellness team. In year two, schools that successfully completed year one are eligible for funding to support ongoing wellness initiatives and implementation of the 10 PHS lessons. After successfully participating in the first two years of the program, schools in their third year and beyond can apply for yearly wellness grant funding through Project Healthy Schools. These funds are available through a competitive grant program to sustain and support the health and well-being of participating schools and their students, staff and communities. Schools will continue to have access to:

- **Consultation** — A Project Healthy Schools wellness coordinator will provide on-site and remote consultation and technical assistance.
- **Wellness champion network** — Continue to connect with wellness champions from other schools to earn SCECHs, network and share ideas and information.
- **Online tools and resources** — The school wellness champions will have web-based access to program materials and other online resources through the Project Healthy Schools portal.



## Eligibility

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- Public, charter or private nonprofit schools in Michigan are eligible.
- Building Healthy Communities is available to all Michigan schools regardless of their:
  - Free and reduced-price school meals percentage
  - Geographic location
- Schools taking part in other healthy eating, nutrition education, physical activity or physical education programs are eligible.
- Schools that applied in prior years but weren't selected are encouraged to apply again.
- Middle schools must serve students in the fifth, sixth or seventh grade to be eligible.
- Schools that already have Project Healthy Schools aren't eligible.
- Schools that previously received a **Building Healthy Communities** program aren't eligible.

## Criteria for school selection

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Participating schools are selected based on:

- Commitment to implementing all components of the program (assessment, education, wellness initiatives and measurement) in collaboration with the Project Healthy Schools wellness coordinator. They're also selected based on their commitment to sustain all components in subsequent school years
- Active administrative engagement throughout the application and implementation process
- Identification of one or two staff members to act as wellness champions who possess a willingness and commitment to lead the students, staff and community in creating a healthy school environment
- Commitment to forming a school wellness team that will meet a minimum of four times during the first year of the program
- Identification of a health, physical education or core academic class during the school day (minimum of a 45-minute period) where the 10 Project Healthy Schools lessons will be taught to all fifth, sixth or seventh grade students. In addition, each school must select one or more teachers who will be trained by a PHS wellness coordinator to deliver the lessons
- Identification of a class and teacher at each grade level where the social emotional health lessons will be taught. Each teacher implementing the lessons will receive training prior to teaching the lessons
- Access for students to internet-based technology to support completion of online questionnaires and surveys (This is desired, but not required.)
- Demonstration of need within a school district, school readiness and available funding

## How to apply

1. Review the application, frequently asked questions and other information on the Project Healthy Schools website at <http://www.projecthealthyschools.org/apply-now/>.\*
2. Email the Project Healthy Schools team with program or application questions at [projecthealthyschools@umich.edu](mailto:projecthealthyschools@umich.edu).
3. Apply at <http://www.projecthealthyschools.org/apply-now/>\* by **April 30, 2025 at 11:59 p.m. Eastern time.**



We're committed to leading Michigan to a healthier future — and investing in the next generation of Michigan citizens.

