Project Healthy Schools Goals

- Eat more fruits and vegetables
- Choose less sugary food and beverages
- Eat less fast and fatty food
- Be active every day
- Spend less time in front of a screen

Did you know?

- PHS was selected as one of 50 nonprofit organizations to receive a $20,000 Champions for Healthy Kids grant to support grassroots programs that promote healthy eating and active lifestyles targeted to kids and families. The grant program, supported by the General Mills Foundation, is awarded by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation.
- The American College of Cardiology has named PHS Founder, Kim A. Eagle, M.D., as the editor of the college’s web platform, ACC.org.
- The 2014 PHS Wellness Champion Annual Spring Meeting was attended by 15 wellness champions from 13 schools.

You are invited!

Project Healthy Schools (PHS) is planning a 10-year anniversary celebration on the evening of November 7, 2014. Please save the date and plan on joining the celebration! The evening will include a reception and presentations from program participants who have benefitted from PHS, as well as a few words from PHS Founder, Kim A. Eagle, M.D., A. Walter Hewlett Professor of Internal Medicine, and Director, Samuel and Jean Frankel Cardiovascular Center. (See Dr. Eagle’s interview on page 2.) Watch your mail for details.

State of Michigan to fund five new PHS schools

The Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) is joining the Building Healthy Communities partnership. As a result, Project Healthy Schools (PHS), will receive funding to start programming in five additional new schools this fall. These schools are in addition to the eight schools already planning to start the “Building Healthy Communities: Engaging middle-school students through Project Healthy Schools” program this fall. PHS is now working to select the five new schools which will be announced in early September.

**Building Healthy Communities** is a partnership between Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, Michigan Department of Community Health, Michigan Fitness Foundation, United Dairy Industry of Michigan, University of Michigan, and Wayne State University.

PHS to add 13 new schools this fall

Thirteen new schools will start PHS in the 2014-2015 school year as part of the “Building Healthy Communities: Engaging Middle Schools through Project Healthy Schools” program. This includes the five schools that will be funded by MDCH (see article above) and the eight new schools that were already selected to start the program this fall. The eight new schools are:

- Allendale Middle School (Allendale - Ottawa County)
- Columbia Middle School (Brooklyn -
  (See 13 new schools on back page)
Interview with PHS Founder Kim Eagle, M.D.

Ten years ago, Project Healthy Schools was piloted in Clague Middle School in Ann Arbor. We spoke with PHS Founder, Kim A. Eagle, A. Walter Hewlett Professor of Internal Medicine, and a director of the University of Michigan Health System’s Samuel and Jean Frankel Cardiovascular Center to get his perspective on the origins of the program.

PHS: What was the original vision for the program?
K.E.: “The original notion was that we would work with middle schools to try to promote educational lessons surrounding nutrition and physical activity, work with the school cafeteria and those who provide vending choices to provide healthier options, and create an overall environment celebrating healthy behaviors in the schools. We wanted to keep our program simple and understandable. That is how we ended up with the five simple goals which continue to this day. The creation of the educational programming around these five simple lessons was directed by LaVaughn Palma-Davis and her excellent team from MHealthy.”

PHS: Why did you decide to target middle school children?
K.E.: “I think one could argue that the current problem in childhood obesity begins in utero and continues late into life. [At the External Advisory Committee for the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute meeting,] we asked some of the nation’s top social scientists to identify which age group they would consider targeting. What was interesting was this general sense that students in middle school are in a transition period from childhood to adulthood. They are beginning to adopt beliefs, attitudes, and lifestyles which they will often carry into their adult life. Therefore, it seemed like if one had to pick a particular age to address the problem, particularly with education, that choosing students in middle school during this childhood to adult transition would make the most sense.”

“Second, at that time I was on the External Advisory Committee for the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. Because this important 20 member committee recognized that childhood obesity was becoming an increasingly important health issue for the nation, we asked the Institutes to arrange for experts in childhood obesity to come to Washington to present to our committee. [We discovered that] while there were a myriad of studies looking at how excess fast food, sugary food, and fatty food had an effect on childhood health and how both nutrition and exercise played into the current problem, there were surprisingly few robust interventions being attempted in the entire nation!

“The third factor that played into this was my own personal friendships with several members of the Washtenaw County school board. These individuals, particularly Randy Friedman, were encouraged when I started talking to them about the notion of creating a program to try to target middle school students.”

PHS: Where did the idea for a program like PHS come from and what led you to pursue it so passionately?
Kim Eagle: “My involvement with Project Healthy Schools began through the intersection of three different experiences. First, 10-12 years ago I had a son in public schools and I was frustrated with the types of food that were being served in the school, as well as the lack of physical activity that typifies our public school curriculum.

“Once the program started to gain momentum we were able to apply for gifts and grants from a variety of mechanisms. Later, our involvement in Detroit largely represented a partnership with the Robert and Ellen Thompson Foundation where we linked Project Healthy Schools’ goals and health curriculum with the goals of the Thompson Charter Schools which were focused on academic achievement for Detroit children.”

PHS: What do you see as the most significant milestones?
K.E.: “We’ve grown from 1 school 10 years ago to more than 50 this year. We’ve reached more than 25,000 students. We’ve shown improvement in childhood behaviors and physiologic measures at both one year and out to three years.

In terms of expansion, the AstraZeneca HealthCare Foundation has had a huge impact on our program by sponsoring a number of schools. The Thompson Foundation has had a huge impact. More recently, the program with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan has allowed us to significantly expand the program. We have been the beneficiaries of numerous gifts and grants from both individuals and small and large foundations which have been transformative.”

PHS: How has being part of the University of Michigan been a factor in the program’s success?
K.E.: “When you realize that childhood obesity represents the single largest threat to the health of our nation, it seems to me that a great academic public university and health system like the University of Michigan must play an active role in seeking solutions. We are very fortunate that across the University there are many dynamic investigators trying to understand the underpinnings and potential actions that can be taken to fight this cultural health issue. Among all of these, Project Healthy Schools stands out in so many ways because it is an active intervention which has proven itself to have benefit across a wide spectrum of schools: rural, urban, prosperous communities, poor communities and everything in between. We are fortunate that we have a tremendous team of talent here which has been gathered from across our community to help continue to evolve the program to be more impactful.”

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TV linked to poor snacking habits, heart risk in middle school students

Middle school kids who park themselves in front of the TV for two hours or more each day are more likely to consume junk food and have risk factors for cardiovascular disease, even compared to those who spend an equal amount of time on the computer or playing video games, according to Project Healthy Schools research presented at the American College of Cardiology’s 63rd Annual Scientific Session.

"While too much of both types of screen time encourages sedentary behavior, our study suggests high TV time, in particular, is associated with poorer food choices and increased cardiovascular risk," says study senior author Elizabeth Jackson, M.D., M.P.H., cardiologist at the University of Michigan Frankel Cardiovascular Center.

In fact, sixth-graders who reported watching between two and six hours of TV a day were more likely to have higher body mass index, elevated systolic and diastolic blood pressure and slower recovery heart rate compared with those reporting low screen time or kids who had comparable computer/video game use.

The study included 1,003 sixth-graders from 24 middle schools participating in Project Healthy Schools across five diverse communities in Southeast Michigan. Researchers used standardized questionnaires to collect information about health behaviors including the type and frequency of screen time, snacking habits, food and beverage choices in the last 24 hours.

Healthy students are better students

The PHS team attended the Michigan Learning Connection Summit in May. Research presented at the summit reinforced the importance of school-based wellness programs like PHS, showing that healthy students are better students.

Of particular note was a presentation by Naiman A. Khan, PhD, RD, of the Department of Kinesiology & Community Health, Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In a presentation titled, “The Effects of Exercise, Obesity and Nutrition on Cognition in Children,” he shared some of the findings from his own and his department’s research. His presentation emphasized the crucial link between physical activity, quality nutrition, obesity, and academic performance.

One study showed that after a 20 minute walk, students’ reading and math scores improved significantly compared to a similar group who remained sedentary. In addition, brain imaging showed that the students who walked for 20 minutes experienced improved cognitive function1. Other interesting findings presented included:

- Physical fitness, as indicated by the number of laps a child can run, had a positive association with academic performance.2
- Higher body mass index (BMI) had a moderate negative association with academic performance.3
- A healthy diet had a positive correlation with a child’s attention span (ability to avoid interference and distraction).4
- Fewer than 50% of 6 to 11 year olds and fewer than 12% of youths age 12 and over meet the daily physical activity recommendations.5

These were just a few of the interesting points made at the Michigan Learning Connection Summit that showed that the work Project Healthy Schools is doing not only helps students develop healthy habits and make health improvements, but may also help improve their academic performance.

1 Hillman et al. (2009). Neuroscience, 159, 1044-1054
13 new schools

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Jackson County)
- Delton Kellogg Middle School (Delton - Barry County)
- Dixon Educational Learning Academy (Detroit - Wayne County)
- Johnson Upper elementary School (Livonia – Wayne County)
- Pierce Middle School (Waterford – Oakland County)
- Swartz Creek Middle School (Swartz Creek – Genesee County)
- White Pine Middle School (Saginaw – Saginaw County)

The PHS team met with the above selected schools in May and June to review the program requirements and answer questions about the program. The principals and wellness champions from the new schools attended a PHS orientation in Ann Arbor on August 19.

Eight middle schools started the “Building Healthy Communities: Engaging Middle Schools through Project Healthy Schools” program in the 2013-2014 school year and have successfully completed the first year of the program. A total of 21 schools will receive PHS as part of Building Healthy Communities this school year. Counting the schools starting in 2014-2015, a total of 56 schools have implemented PHS since the program began in 2004.

A high school health ambassador’s perspective on PHS

Randy Strassburg is one of seven high school students who chose serving as a Project Healthy Schools Health Ambassador as his final project in Ann Arbor Skyline High School’s Science of Wellness class. Strassburg and the other Health Ambassadors displayed posters about their experiences at the Science of Wellness Expo in May. Strassburg, a senior who taught the PHS lessons at Slauson Middle School, took a few moments to talk with PHS about his experience.

“My poster was about lesson number five, “Get the Beat,” which was about exercise and heart rate. We really educated the students about how increasing your heart rate is beneficial, because your heart is a muscle, so as you work it out more, it becomes stronger,” said Strassburg.

“For this lesson, first we found everyone’s pulse,” explained Strassburg. “We measured their resting heart rate. Then we had the students guess which activities would raise their heart rate the most. After we took the students guesses, we did each activity -- jogging in place, walking around the room, doing a high knees exercise -- for 60 seconds. After that we stopped, measured everyone’s heart rate and compared. The students really enjoyed that. They got to get out of their seats and be active, which is really important in the classroom,” said Strassburg.

“Another thing we talked about is the difference between fat and muscle,” continued Strassburg. “We showed them the structures of five pounds of fat and five pounds of muscle. That really struck them! They really noticed the difference between how much space five pounds of fat took up, where as five pounds of muscle was compact. It was strong. We really stressed building muscle, converting fat into muscle. Making sure that the weight you put on is healthy.”

Summing up the teaching experience, Strassburg said, “It was really fun to interact with them. They’re going to have these habits for the rest of their young adult life. It’s really important to teach them good habits and help them make smart decisions to have a positive health.”

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Information on how to donate is available at
www.projecthealthyschools.org