PHS named “Program of the Year”

The new year always starts with award season, when the Grammy, Oscar, Golden Globe and the less well known, but equally impressive, University of Michigan Hospitals and Health Centers (UMHHC) Program of the Year awards are announced. On February 10, 2014 Project Healthy Schools (PHS) was named UMHHC 2013 Support Services Program of the Year. This recognition is a great honor that speaks to the superb work and dedication of the PHS team. Winners are recognized for their excellence and innovation.

Wetsman Foundation grant funds PHS high school program

In January, PHS began piloting the Science of Wellness program, which is designed for high school students, at Medicine and Community Health Academy (MCHA) at Cody High School in Detroit. The Science of Wellness program was developed by Skyline High School teacher, Jeff Bradley. He created the program based on the PHS curriculum, and has been teaching it at Skyline for several years. PHS collaborated with Bradley to package the course into web-based modules for use in other schools. A grant from the Wetsman Foundation made this collaboration and implementation of the program possible.

About the program

The Science of Wellness course takes place four days per week at MCHA at Cody High School, for the entire semester. It provides students an introduction to the field of public health sciences through physician role plays and exciting “hands-on” projects. The curriculum, which is designed for use in 10th or 11th grade science class, includes five units, with lessons and activities. The first unit reviews the 10 original PHS lessons for sixth graders. The second unit looks at food marketing, design, politics, policies and food-related diseases. In the third unit, students analyze food and the science of food as a public health concern. Unit four has students study genetic reasons for obesity as well as the blood chemistry of the obesity gene. The final unit includes a service project that requires students to apply the skills learned in the lessons.

(See High school program on back page)
The PHS program at Lincoln Middle School, which started in January 2012, will become self-sustaining at the end of the 2013-2014 school year. Lincoln achieved sustainability using the three-years-to-sustainability model announced by PHS in 2012. Key elements of the model include identifying a wellness champion, establishing a wellness team, gaining the support of the school’s administration and transitioning program responsibility to the wellness champion over three years. Lincoln achieved these milestones and more.

One key success factor at Lincoln is district-level support for health and wellness. Lincoln formed a district wellness team that meets monthly during the school year and has administrative representation from every school in the district. It also includes school counselors, nurses, parents, and community representatives.

Fundraising was another key to success. During the 2012-2013 school year, the wellness team hosted a couple of Hat Day events. These were so successful that during the 2013-2014 school year, every early release school day is a Hat Day. Students are able to pay $1 to wear a hat for the day. Each event raises $150-$200 for the wellness team and Project Healthy Schools program sustainability.

Lincoln also has an exceptional wellness champion, Diane Colwell, who demonstrates a high level of interest and commitment to her role with the program. She participates on the wellness team and communicates about PHS initiatives with staff, students, administrators and parents. She also helps prepare and organize props for the PHS lessons that are taught by the sixth-grade health teacher in health class.

Another key to Lincoln’s success is the high level of support from the school’s administration. Assistant Principal, Gen Bertsos, is responsible for wellness at the district level which results in a vested interest in the success of Project Healthy Schools at the middle school. Bertsos is present at all wellness team meetings, and supports all initiatives at the highest level.

A word from UPSM Wellness Champion, Alaina Dague

Alaina Dague took over as PHS Wellness Champion at University Prep Science and Math Academy (UPSM) last fall. She is excited about teaching in Detroit. This is her first year as a sixth-grade social studies and English teacher and her first year as the wellness champion. She says, “In middle school, we are growing young people just as much as we are growing young minds. It is important that we help our students develop healthy habits that they can maintain throughout their lives.”

Asked about what she hopes to accomplish as a wellness champion, Dague says, “We are in the process of ensuring that our students have access to water as a second beverage option at lunch. We just started the PHS lessons and will conclude the year with the second annual UPSM 5K Walk/Run!”

Dague’s personal wellness goals include making time for healthy eating and exercise. If there was one thing she would change in the school to create a healthier environment, she says, “I would like to see our students have more opportunities for physical activity during the day.”

Dague’s enthusiasm and leadership is making a healthy difference at UPSM as she works with PHS to create more healthy options for students and to make the program sustainable at the school.
DeRoy Foundation makes a generous gift to PHS

At a recent board meeting, the Trustees of the DeRoy Testamentary Foundation approved a two-year grant to support the Project Healthy Schools program. The gift will be used to teach children of Southeast Michigan, in particular those in underserved areas such as Detroit, the importance of healthy living. The foundation’s investment will allow PHS to strengthen and leverage the skills found within its valuable network of employees and volunteers, providing the resources to deliver consultation and training to school coordinators and wellness champions, among other things.

In making the gift, the Trustees of the DeRoy Testamentary Foundation said they, “Appreciate the value of this important program for the youth of Southeast Michigan and are pleased to provide this support.” PHS is very grateful to the DeRoy Testamentary Foundation for their generous gift.
Why a high school program

PHS program co-founder Kim Eagle, M.D., Albion Walter Hewlett Professor of Internal Medicine and director of the Samuel and Jean Frankel Cardiovascular Center at the University of Michigan, was aware of Bradley’s work at Skyline High School. He also knew that although PHS research shows that the PHS program makes a long-term improvement in participants’ cardiovascular risk factors, by the ninth grade, cholesterol levels, while still better than at baseline, begin to rise. He began to envision a high school version of PHS. He shared his vision with Bill and Janis Wetsman, who have been supporting children’s health programs and the arts for years and formed the Wetsman Foundation to continue this work.

The Wetsman’s commitment

“When Kim [Eagle], who we respect very much, told us about the work PHS is doing, supporting the program seemed like a natural fit with our focus on supporting children’s health,” says Bill Wetsman, who along with his wife Janis, now serve on the PHS Advisory Board.

Janis Wetsman, who is a former educator, added, “Obesity can have such a negative impact on a child’s ability to learn and on their self-esteem. When a child is growing up in poverty, as is the case for so many children in Detroit, the parents often don’t have the means or the education to help their children with a proper diet. All of these things can profoundly impact the child’s ability to do well academically. We wanted to do something that would help make a difference for these children.”

Choosing a High School

With a grant from the Wetsman Foundation, in late 2012 PHS began working with Bradley on developing a high school version of the program. Bob Galardi, who is an educational consultant in Detroit and a member of the PHS Advisory Board, suggested that the program would be a good fit for Cody High School’s Medicine and Community Health Academy. In fall 2013, he met with principal, Michelle Parker who identified science teacher Andrea Ewasek to teach the course.

Delivering the Program

Bradley made several trips to Detroit in the fall to deliver the PHS Science of Wellness tool kit and meet with Ewasek to explain how to use all the scientific equipment. The tool kit contains specialized DNA equipment to analyze the obesity gene on a chromosome during a three day lab. It also contains a heart monitor, blood pressure and EKG sensors to obtain vital signs needed to run inquiry science experiments, as well as several DVDs and various other lab supplies.

Ewasek began teaching the course in January to her class of 20 students. Ewasek says, “In Science of Wellness the kids are exposed to a very practical side of health and nutrition and through hands on experiences they learn how to make positive choices in their lives.”

One of her students added, “If you want to live longer, come to Science of Wellness to learn about health.”

PHS is grateful to the Wetsmans for making development and implementation of the Science of Wellness program possible.

Thank You PHS Supporters!

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We are also grateful to the many other corporations, foundations and individual donors who have supported PHS over the years.

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

Project Healthy Schools: 734-764-0246, www.projecthealthyschools.org