Michigan elementary schools invited to apply for program that helps kids improve their health

*Building Healthy Communities emphasizes physical activity and healthy eating in schools*

Michigan elementary schools are again invited to apply for a program that focuses on children’s health by creating healthier school environments around healthy eating and physical activity.

The statewide program, *Building Healthy Communities*, is a partnership between Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan (BCBSM), Michigan Department of Community Health, Michigan Fitness Foundation, United Dairy Industry of Michigan, University of Michigan and Wayne State University’s Center for School Health where students, teachers and administrators receive critical support, curriculum, resources and equipment.

“*Building Healthy Communities* helps establish the knowledge and behaviors kids need for a lifetime of healthy choices and a school environment that makes the healthy choice an easy choice for them to make every day,” said Lynda Rossi, executive vice president of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. “Ultimately, *Building Healthy Communities* is a true partnership that can help us build a healthier Michigan, and that starts with our youngest citizens.”

The *Building Healthy Communities* program is an evidence-based, comprehensive, school-wide initiative that aligns with the Michigan Health and Wellness 4 x 4 Plan and works with schools and their communities to teach kids healthy habits and address childhood obesity. All public, charter and private elementary schools in the state are encouraged to apply for the program by March 2, 2015.
By helping kids stay healthier, the program can also help increase academic success and stem the growing economic and health care burden of obesity in the state. Since its launch in 2009, BHC has reached more than 100,000 students in 275 schools.

Child health experts have repeatedly called for schools to provide healthier school environments that support nutrition education, access to nutrient rich food and beverages, physical activity and physical education – all pillars in the Building Healthy Communities program.

“The Building Healthy Communities program helps students and families get healthier, improving their quality of life and ultimately reducing health care costs for Michigan residents,” said Nick Lyon, director of the Michigan Department of Community Health. “The Building Healthy Communities partnership brings together private organizations and the public sector to implement evidence-based best practices to create healthier school environments so we can make progress in the fight against childhood obesity. This is an investment that will pay off for Michigan and help us build healthier futures for our families together.”

“Building Healthy Communities provides a great model for how we can partner together to help kids make the healthy choice throughout their lives, whether in the food they eat, the beverages they drink and the activities they engage in,” said Nate McCaughtry, director for the Center for School Health, Wayne State University. “Building Healthy Communities is already making a positive impact that’s affecting tens of thousands of kids across Michigan. We invite schools in communities across Michigan to reach out and be a part of this success story.”

Schools interested in applying for the Building Healthy Communities program can join an informational conference call on Feb. 17 at 10 a.m. or 4 p.m. To join, call 605-475-4700 and enter pass code 759821#. Schools selected to receive the program will be announced in May.

For more information on the Building Healthy Communities program and application process, visit www.bcbsm.com/buildhealth. For more information about the Michigan Health and Wellness 4 x 4 Plan, visit www.michigan.gov/healthymichigan.

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