



Project Healthy Schools at U Prep

Project Healthy Schools is a community based, University of Michigan collaboration designed to reduce childhood obesity and improve the current and future health of Michigan's youth. The program was started in 2004 in response to the alarming increase of childhood obesity and other preventable cardiovascular risk factors. Through education and wellness activities, this program helps middle school students to increase physical activity, eat healthier, and understand how nutrition and activity influence their lifelong health. In order to build a sustainable healthy school culture, they use a five-step process which includes, building support, assessing school wellness culture, school wellness improvement plan (SWIP), taking action, and measuring success.

This program is currently in 106 schools in Michigan and through the generosity of the Thompson Foundation, U Prep has been able to participate with Project Healthy Schools for the last 12 years. The program has worked with 6th graders from UPA and UPSM while UPAD involves their 7th graders. These activities and educational experiences are set up by wellness coordinators from each school. Those coordinators being Brienn Frederick (UPSM), Blair Humphrys (UPAD) and Jessica Barrett (UPA).

In the past, U Prep students have participated in staff vs. student basketball/volleyball games, 5K walk and run, and school-wide fitness challenges. "I like watching the students get competitive over certain challenges, especially the students that don't really participate in other classes." said Jessica Barrett. For nutrition experiences Project Healthy Schools has set up smoothie and parfait bars as well as pomegranate and apple tastings to help expose students to new healthy food options. Students were very intrigued by the visual appeal of the fruit, as well as the sweet flavor. The tasting included education about the health benefits of pomegranate and a discussion about antioxidants. Brienn Frederick, Crew leader at UPSM shared that the students love this program! "I love the whole school initiatives and the feedback from the 6th graders at the end of the experience on all of the information that they have learned, and things they are now doing differently since learning the new information." Students also help volunteer by setting up the events and connecting with their peers to talk about health. Staff is involved too, as they have staff lunches and seminars that focus on mindfulness and mental health.

Last spring, despite being fully virtual, each school was able to successfully implement at least one wellness initiative and all schools were able to utilize the newly developed PHS Online Resources website to complete the educational component of the program. Project Healthy Schools plans on adopting a fully virtual program and experiences for this school year.

Jacob Ribidou is the Health Coordinator from Project Healthy Schools that works directly with U Prep. He has been working with U Prep for the last three years and has helped put together events like the 5K as well as informational events on healthy foods at school dances. "The big

reason why I think Project Healthy Schools is unique is our flexibility to adapt to each school's environment. All three schools are different and my goal is to treat each school individually and meet their needs. Working behind the scenes and being able to offer the resources that we have and seeing how it really impacts and helps the kids is my favorite part.” Jacob spoke on in his excitement and vision for Project Healthy Schools upcoming collaboration with U Prep as well. He stated, “Integration between all three schools and having a whole district challenge is something I look forward to working with. Creating unity and healthy competition between all three schools doing the same program would be awesome to see.”

With the new year upon us, we are looking forward to doing more work with Project Healthy Schools and continuing to educate our scholars on the importance of fitness and nutrition!

