



## CASE STUDY

**CHERRYLAND MIDDLE SCHOOL, ELK RAPIDS, MICHIGAN****STUDENT-LED TEAM**

In order to empower students to be health champions, Jami Gray, the health teacher at Cherryland Middle School in Elk Rapids, created a student-led health committee called PULSE: Preventing Unhealthy Lifestyles Every Day. The team is supervised by the health and physical education teachers and works closely with the school foodservice department. The team's premise is to determine, plan, and implement health education efforts and improvements to the school health environment that have been approved by school staff. Twenty student volunteers participate on the PULSE team which meets during lunch for 30 minutes two times a month.

"Our new school PULSE team has empowered our students to think about everyday occurrences from the perspective of personal health," said Mrs. Eberle, 7th grade teacher at Cherryland Middle School. "They have been instrumental in advocating for less processed food in the cafeteria and for more fruit and vegetable choices. They use peer pressure in a very positive way to encourage others to move more, eat well, and stay hydrated."

The following is a sampling of the accomplishments through the initiatives championed by the PULSE team over the last five years:

- Painted murals on the walls of the lunchroom depicting the Food Guide Pyramid and the student's version of Veggie Tales.
- Created public service announcements on Animoto which were broadcast school-wide.
- Decreased ala carte availability to two times per week to encourage school lunch participation and encourage selection of healthier food and beverage choices.
- Recommended the switch from Styrofoam lunch trays to hard plastic trays that can be washed.
- Discontinued fried foods and sold the school's deep-fat fryer.
- Championed taste-testing of vegetables.
- Provided health-related presentations to the entire school.
- Involved in morning calisthenics.
- Championed 20-minute hall walks two times a week before school.
- Requested that students have access to drinking water during lunch.
- Planned a field trip to the "Bodies Revealed" exhibit at the Grand Rapids Public Museum.

The PULSE team operates on a miniscule budget. Projects championed by the PULSE team are cost-neutral. The only project requiring funding is a field trip to the "Bodies Revealed" exhibit at the Grand Rapids Public Museum.

Students, faculty and the community have embraced the PULSE initiatives. "I like how they did the lunch changes here," said Heidi, a 6th grader, "It makes us more healthy." Sam, an 8th grader, said, "I like that we have healthier choices in our lunchroom. I like that we don't have French fries now because I would eat them every day."

**"Our town loves the healthy changes going on at Cherryland Middle School," said Gray, who is also a member of the Coordinated School Health Team. "Parents want their kids to eat well and be offered healthy choices at school. Also, parents appreciate the PULSE team's view on saving the environment from a bunch of Styrofoam trays."**

Gray said that the biggest challenge has been getting everyone on board with tray washing. On a rotating basis, several students helped wash the lunch trays each day, which took time away from recess. "We talked to them as a PULSE team quite a few times and told them that if we do this we'll save over 300,000 Styrofoam trays from being thrown in the garbage," said Gray. "They jumped right in and followed our schedule created by the PULSE kids." Zach, a 7th grader, said, "I think the tray washing is really good because it cuts back on the Styrofoam trays in landfills. It's always good to save the Earth!"

"I would encourage any school to create their very own health committee," said Gray. "There is nothing better than empowering students to teach others about being healthier."