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Teresa Roof | 515.376.5869 | RoofT@wellmark.com
Gunnar Olson | 515.334.0075 | golson@dmampo.org

With \$75,000 grant, pilot project seeks to improve health with walkable schools

Getting to school in the most healthful way — by walking or biking — will become an easier choice for students of three Des Moines Public Schools, under a pilot project made possible by a \$75,000 Matching Assets to Community Health (MATCH) challenge grant from The Wellmark Foundation.

Called “Step It Up DSM,” the pilot program seeks to address policy, programming and infrastructure barriers to active transportation for Carver Elementary School, Hiatt Middle School and East High School. For example, policies determining the placement of crossing guards could be rewritten, programs could be introduced to teach students the benefits of walking, and improvements could be made to the physical street and sidewalk network surrounding the schools. When complete, the program is intended to be used as a model that other schools could replicate across the state of Iowa.

“The Wellmark Foundation is proud to support this pilot project that will help reduce the barriers that make it difficult for children to walk to school,” said Becky Wampler, The Wellmark Foundation executive director. “The easier it is for children to be more active, the better off they will be physically, mentally and emotionally.”

The pilot program was developed by five Iowa organizations as an answer to U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy’s call to action to “Step It Up,” a national effort to combat chronic diseases, the leading causes of death in the United States. The Step It Up DSM team includes the City of Des Moines, the Iowa Department of Public Health, Iowa Healthiest State Initiative, Des Moines Public Schools, and the Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization.

The team’s walkability action plan was first developed with travel assistance from the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD) when Des Moines Area MPO was selected as one of only 10 teams to attend NACDD’s Walkability Action Institute in Decatur, Georgia, last April. Attending teams experienced a cutting edge, action-oriented course with national experts to learn about creating more walkable and active communities. Each team created a team action plan to guide their region’s next steps in becoming more walkable and more active.

In addition to improving the walkability around three schools, the Step It Up DSM program will assist with the update and implementation of the City of Des Moines’ Complete Streets Policy, which was first adopted in 2008. Also, the Des Moines Area MPO will develop a model to measure the positive or negative health impacts of transportation projects.

More information about Step It Up DSM is available online at www.dmampo.org/step-it-up-dsm/.

ABOUT THE FUNDERS



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The Wellmark Foundation is a private, non-profit foundation created by Wellmark, Inc., doing business as Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Iowa. Please visit The Wellmark Foundation's Web site at www.wellmark.com/foundation to learn more about our grant program, as well as a list of previous grant recipients. Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield and The Wellmark Foundation are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.



The National Association of Chronic Disease Directors is headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, and improves the health of the public by strengthening state-based leadership and expertise for chronic disease prevention in states and at the national level. NACDD achieves this work through many programs, services, and projects. Specific to active and healthy communities, NACDD also extends to regions and local communities. NACDD's Healthy Communities efforts span 58 communities and 32 regions in 40 states.

ABOUT THE 'STEP IT UP DSM' PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) works with non-profit organizations, health care providers, policymakers, businesses, and many others to protect and improve the health of Iowans. Public health strives to improve the quality of life for all Iowans by assuring access to quality population-based health services related to the following goals: promoting healthy living; preventing injuries and violence; strengthening the health infrastructure; protecting against environmental hazards; preventing epidemics and the spread of disease; and preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies.



The Iowa Healthiest State Initiative is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization driven by the goal to make Iowa the healthiest state in the nation. By engaging worksites, communities, schools, retail food, organizations, institutions and individuals, we can inspire Iowans and their communities to improve their health and happiness, and ultimately achieve our goal. For more information, visit www.iowahealthieststate.com.



Des Moines Public Schools is Iowa's largest provider of elementary and secondary education, serving more than 33,000 students at 60 schools in the state's capital city. The district offers a wide range of educational programs, some of which can only be found in Des Moines, and that have received state and national honors, including top-ranked Advanced Placement courses, International Baccalaureate schools, career and technical educational programs, and Iowa's only public Montessori school. DMPS is also the state's most diverse school district, and educates students who were born in more than 100 different nations. One of Iowa's largest employers, DMPS has more than 5,000 dedicated teachers and staff, many of whom have earned state or national recognition for their work in the classroom as well as in areas ranging from financial management to communications to energy conservation and more.



The City of Des Moines is Iowa's capital city and local government servicing more than 212,000 residents, 51+ neighborhoods, over 4,000 miles of parkland and 81 miles of trails. The City of Des Moines stands to be a financially strong city with exceptional city services, fostering an involved community in a customer friendly atmosphere. Visit our website www.dmgov.org, Facebook facebook.com/DesMoinesGov and Twitter [@DesMoinesGov](https://twitter.com/DesMoinesGov).



The Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) acts as a regional forum to ensure coordination between the public and local, state, and federal agencies in regard to planning issues and to prepare transportation plans and programs. The MPO develops both long- and short-range multimodal transportation plans, selects and approves projects for federal funding based upon regional priorities, and develops methods to reduce traffic congestion.