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Highmark Foundation grant supports physical activity opportunities in southern West Virginia schools

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. – A grant, aimed at increasing health and wellness in southern West Virginia, will improve opportunities for school-age children to participate in 60 minutes of physical activity each school day. The one-year, \$204,000 grant is designed to create comprehensive school activity programs in McDowell County, W.Va.

The announcement follows an initial six-month planning grant involving faculty from [West Virginia University's College of Physical Activity and Sport Sciences](#), [School of Public Health](#), and the [West Virginia CARDIAC Project](#) along with the McDowell County Board of Education. The grant will establish a comprehensive plan to increase physical activity in each of the 11 schools in the area.

The new initiative, *McDowell CHOICES* (Coordinated Health Opportunities Involving Communities, Environments, and Schools), will develop, implement and evaluate an integrated approach for childhood and youth health. The group hopes to improve physical activity participation using evidence-based strategies in the school setting.

“We are pleased to support improving the health of McDowell County children through providing more opportunities for physical activity participation in the school environment,” said Eloise Elliott, Ware Distinguished Professor, WVU CPASS.

“The Highmark Foundation partnership with WVU and CPASS supports educating the whole child and providing support for the county’s community schools initiative that foster the development of healthy children,” Elliott added.

The grant will focus on providing improved equipment and resources and increased resources for classroom teachers, adding before- and after-school physical activity programs, establishing a system for fitness testing and reporting and fostering shared use between school and community organizations.

The role of the McDowell CHOICES team will help each of the schools to create an on-site school physical activity action plan to include all of the grant elements. McDowell CHOICES representatives will work with school wellness committees and physical education teachers to begin implementation by early 2014.

The grant provides for a program director to live in McDowell County and work alongside organizations with a similar mission of improving healthy lifestyles and effecting significant change. For more information visit <http://www.mcdowellchoices.org/>

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