



news release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 8, 2008

CONTACT: Angela Feig

Senior Corporate Communications Consultant

Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield

636 Grand Avenue, Station 111

Des Moines, Iowa 50309

515-245-4551

feigab@wellmark.com

Wellmark Foundation Provides Funding to Expand Health Education Project in South Dakota Schools

(DES MOINES, IOWA) – Sanford Research/USD in Sioux Falls, S.D., received a \$141,316 two-year grant from The Wellmark Foundation to continue a wellness and health education project in South Dakota elementary schools. In the initial project, which was funded by a Wellmark Foundation grant in 2007, the *Health Explorations* program was created and piloted at Valley Springs Elementary School in the Brandon Valley School District.

Health Explorations, a coordinated health education curriculum that is based on National Health Education Standards, establishes fundamental building blocks for children to understand health information and lead healthy lifestyles, says Jason Raether, R.N., M.S., clinical nurse educator at the Sanford Center for Learning and Innovation, which will lead the program. The curriculum targets children in kindergarten through fifth grade.

“*Health Explorations* had a strong positive impact on the students, families and staff at Valley Springs Elementary in the initial pilot,” explains Raether. “*Health Explorations* will be expanded during this two-year project to allow for continued development, enhancement, evaluation and implementation of the curriculum,” explains Raether.

Strategies will include expanding implementation of *Health Explorations* to additional schools in the Brandon Valley School District, and updating the curriculum repository to facilitate statewide implementation. When completed, *Health Explorations* will be made available to all schools in South Dakota and Iowa, and shared with schools in surrounding states.

According to Raether, another key component of this phase of the project is to recruit institutions of higher education and more community groups to provide program instruction. Nursing students from Augustana College in Sioux Falls will serve as *Health Explorations* guest educators, laying the groundwork for future involvement of other area colleges and universities.

For more information about *Health Explorations* contact Jason Raether at raetherj@sanfordhealth.org or 605-328-6312.

The Wellmark Foundation has provided nearly \$14.7 million to fund 406 health-related grants in Iowa and South Dakota since 1997, including \$1,739,233 this cycle. “The Wellmark Foundation collaborates with non-profit and governmental organizations in Iowa and South Dakota to positively impact the health outcomes of individuals and communities in our states,” says Matthew McGarvey, director of The Wellmark Foundation. “*Health Explorations* will help to increase healthy lifestyle choices among students in South Dakota schools. We are happy to support expansion of this comprehensive health education project,” says McGarvey.

The Wellmark Foundation is a private, non-profit foundation created by Wellmark, Inc., doing business as Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Iowa. Due to the Foundation’s recent significant support toward disaster relief efforts, the timeline for the second 2008 community responsive grant cycle has been modified. Letters of Interest (LOIs) are now due on September 23, 2008. Learn more about this funding opportunity during a grant applicant teleconference on July 21, 2008. For teleconference and LOI details, visit the Foundation’s Web site at www.wellmark.com/foundation. Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield and The Wellmark Foundation are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.