Creighton nursing students have helped fill a gap left by state and national budget cuts to schools by providing screening and prevention services to Omaha-area parochial schools since 2001.

Through the school-health program, elementary and high schools were able to meet state health requirements and Creighton nursing students had an ideal environment to deliver health promotion and prevention to underserved populations.

A partnership was developed between Creighton University School of Nursing and 32 parochial schools. Faculty worked with elementary and high school principals to develop a clinical rotation to provide community-based, pediatric health promotion experiences, with the goal of serving the local community. The partnership provided a needed service for the schools, an opportunity for the School of Nursing to meet its mission of promoting service-learning experiences, and improved access to health promotion and prevention services for primary and secondary school populations. A majority of the 32 schools are located in areas where households have reported incomes equal to or less than state and national poverty levels.

The Healthy Living Project grew out of the school health clinical course during the first semester clinical practicum for accelerated nursing students. Nursing students conducted research and collected body mass indexes on all the children. The data showed an alarming trend of BMI percentages at or above the 95th percentile.

The Healthy Living Project was initiated in fall 2007. Groups of nursing students attended an orientation for the Healthy Living Project. Health classes were taught once a month to the children in the schools during the initial academic year. The nursing students were assigned a health education topic three to four weeks prior to presenting. A 10-minute physical activity exercise was also implemented at the end of each class. A final requirement of this clinical experience was a reflective journal completed at the end of the teaching session.

Ann Laughlin, PhD, RN, Meghan Potnoff, MSN, APRN, Misty Schwartz, PhD, RN, Barbara Synowiecki, MSN, APRN, and Amy Yager, MSN, APRN, describe the program in an article titled “Combining Service-Learning and Research Partnering With Schools” published in the September/October 2010 volume of Nurse Educator. They chronicle how Creighton University School of Nursing identified the need for a new care delivery model.

The program provides excellent service-learning opportunities for the school. There are many benefits to incorporating service-learning concepts into nursing curricula. This Healthy Living Project provided a needed service for the schools and an opportunity for the School of Nursing to meet its mission of promoting service-learning experiences. This program has continued to grow in relation to both the number of school participating as well as the variety of experiences.