



Families learn fitness is fun

By Angie Landsverk | May 4, 2011 | 0 comments

A night designed to show families that exercise is fun is already leading some to spend more time being active at home.

"Since we did the family fitness night, me and my stepdad have been playing baseball. It's my favorite sport, and I wanted to play it," said Zasha Berg, who is a third-grade student at Waupaca Learning Center.

Students in the third-grade classes of Linda Fenton, Jenny Hobson, Maureen Parent and Joan Taylor planned the night.

Originally planned for February, a snow day resulted in the event being rescheduled.

It was held last month at the school, with approximately 80 people attending.

Connie Abert, Waupaca County youth development educator, said it was a service learning project and Active Schools Initiative. The Active Schools Project is sponsored through a grant from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

"It's really about obesity and lowering it," she said. "The CDC is looking at it from that perspective. It used to be that everyone needed 30 minutes per day (of physical activity)."

Now it is recommended that children get 60 minutes of physical activity each day.

Throughout the state, schools and communities are piloting Active Schools strategies to encourage physical activity.

Abert says there are a number of factors that have contributed to an increase in the number of children and adults who are overweight or obese.

People are more sedentary today - both at work and at home. The amount of screen time available to children has increased, she said.

And, at the high school level, the minimum number of physical education credits required is 1.5.

A 2002 countywide health assessment showed that during the 25 years preceding it, the percentage of county residents overweight or obese had tripled, Abert said.

At Waupaca High School, Tom Noltner, who teaches health and physical education, also did service learning with one of his health classes, she said.

At WLC, the families whose children are in the classes of Fenton, Parent, Hobson and Taylor were invited to the family fitness night.

Planning began in January. Students compiled a list of family activities and chose four of them - tae kwan do, tai chi, jump roping and hula hooping - for the special night.

There were fresh fruits for their snacks.

"My parents thought it was very exciting and fun," said third-grader Garret Miller.

The family fitness night also included a speaker.

WHS graduate Blair Rathjen is a physician's assistant at ThedaCare Physicians Waupaca.

Fenton's class wrote a letter to her, and Rathjen talked to the students about the importance of fitness, making healthy eating choices and in trying different activities.

Fenton said the families enjoyed the night and that the next time such a night is held, they hope to include all of the school's third-grade classes. "We moved the whole time - for an hour," she said.

Abert said River Ridge Trail maps were provided and that families also generated a list of things they can do as a family. "One family came up with at least 20 ideas," she said.

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