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MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOLS BENEFIT FROM HEALTH AND FITNESS PROGRAM
SBLI Kids Fitness Day making its mark

WOBURN -Taking a walk, jumping rope, doing a dance or kicking around a soccer ball are all ways that kids can burn calories and stay in great shape.

Unfortunately, with the growing popularity of video games and television over the past 30 years, children are spending far more time sitting in front of the TV than they are getting exercise outside.

According to kidshealth.org, adolescents who are 8 years of age or older spend 4.5 hours watching television or playing video games each day on average.

The result has been expanding waistlines and growing health problems in kids.

Since the early 1970s, obesity in elementary and middle school children has skyrocketed to more than 15 percent, according to kidshealth.org.

Youth is no longer synonymous with good health.

The main contributing factors to this phenomenon have been poor diet and lack of physical activity.

Fortunately, groups are beginning to recognize this epidemic and opportunities to get back to a healthy way of life are more readily being provided.

One program that has been helping to raise awareness over the past two years is the SBLI Kids Fitness Day, which was created and operated by the Massachusetts Amateur Sports Foundation.

Available to all elementary and middle schools in the state, the Fitness Day is a chance to organize a school-wide activity that gets kids re-focused on a healthy lifestyle.

“With the SBLI Kids Fitness Day, our goal is to encourage Massachusetts kids to become the fittest kids in America,” said SBLI President and CEO Robert K. Sheridan. “By teaching and promoting fitness and healthy choices in today’s children, we can greatly increase the likelihood that they will become tomorrow’s healthy adults”

The Fitness Day, which held its first two sessions last fall and spring, has had 72 area schools participate, with six of those schools receiving \$500 grants.

During this time, more than 20,000 students took part in at least 30 minutes of continuous activity on the designated days.

“We had a terrific time,” said Joan Davis, principle of Saint Mary’s Elementary School in Lee. “Our gym teacher did a great job showing the kids dances, and then we had a great time dancing to different songs that were playing in the gym. The total experience of doing it as a group just brought the school closer together.”

Diane Sardanowicz and her students at the Fessenden School in Newton shared a similar experience.

“We had a very successful day,” she said. “The entire elementary school went for a group fitness walk. It was extra special to have not only the students and teachers, but also the whole staff involved. We even had the music department playing instruments for us. Our school truly had 100 percent participation.”

The \$500 grants are a great way for schools' physical education departments to add much needed gymnasium supplies and athletic gear during a time when funding for those programs has decreased sharply.

Past winners of the donation are: Hyannis West Elementary School in Hyannis, Southeast Alternative School in Berkley, Whitinsville Christian School in Whitinsville, Riverbend Elementary School in Athol, the Fessenden School and Saint Mary's Elementary.

"We're in the process of buying pedometers for a stepping program," explained Kris Vanden Akker, physical education teacher at Whitinsville Christian School. "We're very excited about getting that program going, and we definitely couldn't have done it without the grant."

Each school that signs up to participate can hold its fitness day on November 5, 6, 7 or 8. The activity that is done for 30 minutes is determined by each individual school.

This year, the program has many new features available to those who participate, including health and fitness resources on the Web site, baystategames.org, which can be utilized by educators, parents, students and school nutrition professionals.

All participating schools that report 100 percent participation from their students in their 30 minute activity will automatically be entered in a drawing to receive one of the four \$500 donations, courtesy of SBLI and the Bay State Games.

To register your school for the SBLI Kids Fitness Day, please visit baystategames.org, call the Bay State Games office at (781) 932-6555 or email kidschallenge@baystategames.org no later than Friday, November 2.

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