

Train up a child

A program aims to develop healthful habits kids will keep a lifetime

Joe Miller, Staff Writer

WENDELL - Oh, to be deceived by Cap'n Crunch. In a take on the popular kids' game Last One Standing, Kevin Young asks the fourth-graders at Carver Elementary to stand if they had cereal for breakfast. Three-fourths of those assembled in the school's gym enthusiastically jump to their feet. Cereal, they've learned, is part of the federally sanctioned Food Guide Pyramid, so it has to be good.

Then Young, who is vice president of programs for the nonprofit Alice Aycock Poe Center for Health Education in Raleigh, starts the winnowing process.

"Who had Fruit Loops for breakfast?" asks Young, and before anyone can answer, he adds, "Sit down." A handful of disappointed students take their seats. More follow after he ticks off Cap'n Crunch, Count Chocula, Cinnamon Toast Crunch and a host of other sugar-laden cereals. By the time he's done, only a handful -- including a teacher -- remain standing.

Lesson one: Not all cereals are created equal.

The exercise is a fun one, made more



Fourth-graders at Carver Elementary School in Raleigh place sticky notes containing 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' lifestyle choices on a board during an exercise in the Wholesome Routines program.

Hey kids!

Even if you aren't in the Wholesome Routines program, you can still win prizes by following a healthy lifestyle. Here's how.

The Wholesome Routines rewards program is based on the national Drive 2 Fitness program. Each day you can earn up to six points for living right. One point is awarded for each of the following:

- * At least 60 minutes of exercise/physical activity in a day.
- * No more than 60 minutes a day in front of the TV or at the helm of a video game.
- * 8-11 hours of sleep per night.
- * No sugar-added drinks. Stick with water, low-fat milk and 100 percent fruit juices.
- * Eat five to nine fruits and vegetables in a day.

so by Young's persona, Cafeteria Kevin. Young knows that keeping his message of good eating and active living entertaining is as important as the message itself if he hopes to permanently affect the health habits of these impressionable 9- and 10-year-olds.

A fun message, but a direct one as well. Young's objective is a daunting one: To stem the epidemic of childhood obesity that has become particularly prevalent in North Carolina.

Since the mid-1980s, the percentage of overweight kids in the United States has doubled. In North Carolina, the problem is worse. According to a 2004 study by the state, more than one in four North Carolinians ages 12 to 18 is overweight; more than one in five ages 5 to 11 is, too. Health officials cite a host of reasons for the bulging of our youth -- more sedentary, TV- and video-game-focused lifestyles, a growing dependence on fast food -- and the related health risks, among them, according to the state Division of Public Health:

- * 60 percent of overweight kids ages 5 to 10 have at least one "cardiovascular risk factor," such as high cholesterol, elevated blood pressure, increased insulin levels.

- * Rise in Type 2 diabetes, a lifestyle-induced form of the disease that until recently was known as adult-onset diabetes.

Do all five in one day and:

- * Award yourself a bonus point.

Because you aren't officially participating in Drive 2 Fitness, you'll need to work out a reward system with someone -- your parents or grandparents, perhaps. For instance, earn 30 points in a week and Mom and Dad have to clean your room. Or save up for something big.

Visit www.d2f.org for more information on Drive 2 Fitness.

More info

Alice Aycock Poe Center for Health Education opened in 1991 and offers a variety of healthy lifestyle programs to kids in preschool through high school. Most programs are offered to groups, from public schools to camps to Boys and Girls Clubs. Individuals may sign up and sit in on a group class. Most classes are offered at the center at 224 Sunnybrook Road, Raleigh. For more information on the center or on Wholesome Routines, call 231-4006 or www.poehealth.org.

For information on childhood obesity in North Carolina, visit the N.C. Healthy Weight Initiative Web site at www.nchealthyweight.com.

- * Overweight kids have a 70 percent chance of becoming overweight adults.

- * Increased chances for depression, anxiety and social angst.

Which is why Kevin Young was happy to assume the personas of Artie Apple and Captain Calcium on Monday to rev up Carver's fourth-graders for a yearlong program that intends to make the kids healthier not only today, but for the rest of their lives. The three-year program is called Wholesome Routines and it's sponsored by Poe and Duke Health Raleigh Hospital, with \$347,000 in funding from the Duke Endowment.

A quick snapshot of the program:

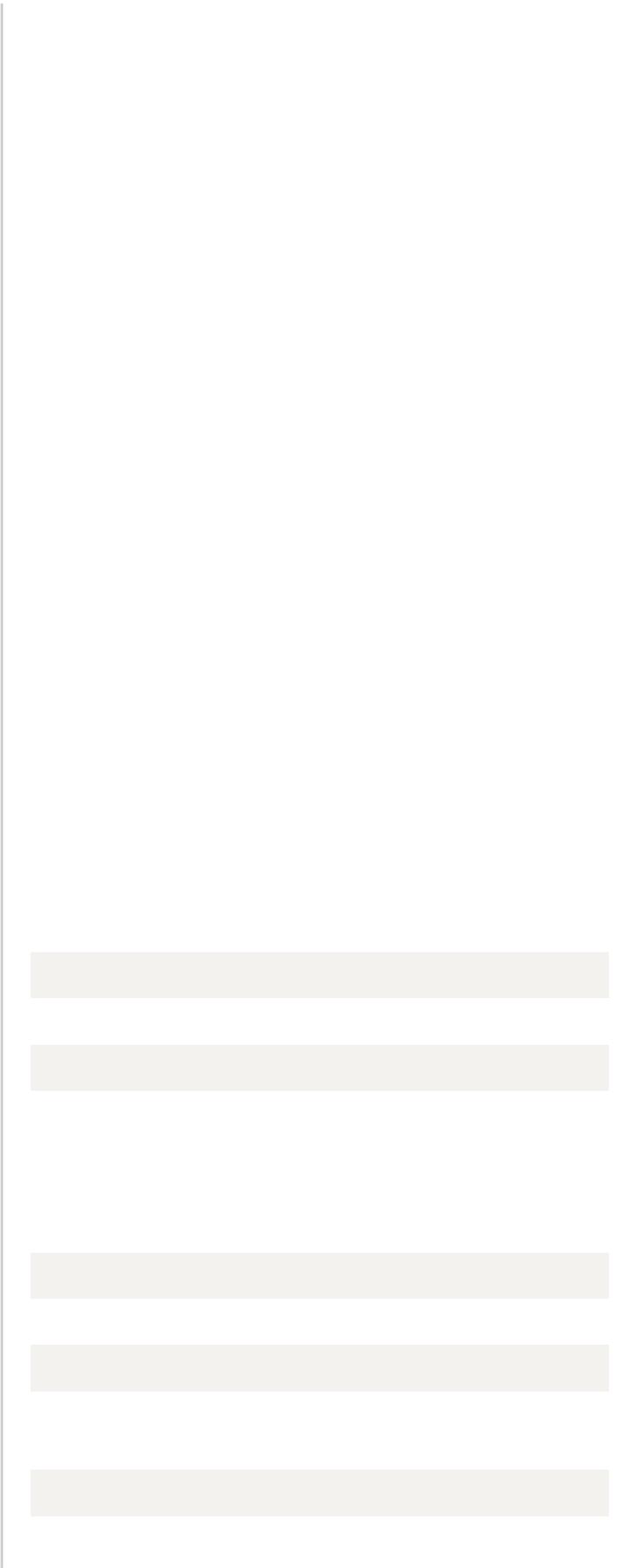
- * In its first year, Wholesome Routines will focus on fourth-graders. Third-graders will be the focus next year, and fifth-graders in the third year.

- * Twenty schools in nine counties are participating in the program. In addition to Carver, two other schools are in Wake County: Rolesville Elementary and Hodge Road Elementary. A total of 2,000 students are involved.

- * Educators from the Poe Center will visit the school once a month for a presentation. At Monday's kickoff at Carver, for instance, the focus was on healthy vs. unhealthy habits.

- * Wholesome Routines goals:

1. Promote healthy eating and physical activity.



2. Help students identified as being overweight drop into the "normal" range for their height and age.
3. Reduce the likelihood of Type 2 diabetes in kids identified as being at risk.

Poe will monitor the students throughout the year -- by weighing the kids and measuring their body mass index, among other things -- to see if the message is getting across.

"The way they're going about it is very impressive," says Meka Sales, program officer for childhood obesity for the N.C. Health and Wellness Trust Fund, which uses some of its share of the tobacco settlement money to look at obesity. "They have a very high standard."

They know good habits

After the kickoff assembly at Carver, three Poe educators -- all dietitians -- descend on Kim Smith's fourth-grade class for their first monthly session. It doesn't take long to see that getting kids to remember what they've learned about healthy living isn't the problem.

"Write down what you think are some healthy habits," Poe's Rebecca Puffer asks the 19 kids in class. After the kids jot their responses on yellow sticky notes and post them on the blackboard, Puffer reads them off: baseball, soccer, jumping rope, lots of nominations for running. Ditto unhealthy habits: smoking, eating fried foods, too much candy, too much soda.

It's not the kids who need educating, health educators agree. It's the parents.

"It's a logical path, in a way," says Sales of the Health and Wellness Trust Fund. "As adults, we get set in modes of operation. We have our favorite foods. We have exercises we like."

That can change, Sales says, if the kids come home from school armed with information and eager to try something new.

Based on Monday's first Wholesome Routines lesson, the kids will go home loaded with information.

Each child was given a blue folder containing worksheets and questionnaires. There was a bright green "Healthy Habits How-To Plan" intended to help the kids set and

meet goals, a white sheet asking questions about healthy and unhealthy activities and a log book for the kids to record what -- and how much -- they eat at every meal.

Because kids respond well to winning prizes, there was also a daily log awarding points for healthy activities. Sixty minutes of physical activity, for instance, is worth a point. Same for watching no more than 60 minutes of TV and getting eight to 11 hours of sleep.

Earn enough points, get a reward. And not, assures Poe CEO Sheila Ryba, gum, candy, cookies. "T-shirts, water bottles -- stuff like that."

Wholesome Resources is yet another educational salvo in the efforts against obesity.

"They've taken off like wildfire," Sheree Thaxton Vodicka with the N.C. Division of Public Health's Healthy Weight Initiative says of such programs.

In short order she ticks off:

- * Fit Together, a program administered by schools, churches, and other community organizations and funded through the Health and Wellness Trust Fund.
- * Growing Up Fit, offered through East Carolina University's School of Medicine.
- * Color Me Healthy, offered through 5,000 day-care centers across the state.
- * Programs at various YMCAs, from Goldsboro to Asheville.

The only one she was aware of that has a follow-up component similar to Wholesome Routines is Fit Together. Results of that program's effectiveness won't be available until late next year.

Meanwhile, the Wholesome Routines educators will be working to get Carver's fourth-graders to drop their weight and body mass index by the end of the school year. Cafeteria Kevin, however, hopes not everything is down when he pays his last visit.

To the students who took a seat at the assembly thanks to Count Chocula and Cap'n Crunch, he issues another challenge.

"We'll see how many of you are standing when I come back at the end of the year."

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