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Updated: 11:16 PM Feb 14, 2011

# Healthy learners: Grant helps students learn good lifestyles choices

COVINGTON — Heard-Mixon Elementary School second-grader Austin King knows he shouldn't smoke so his lungs will stay healthy. He also knows he shouldn't drink too many soft drinks and that he should exercise as much as he can.

Posted: 11:15 PM Feb 14, 2011

Reporter: By Michelle Floyd, Staff Reporter

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Staff Photo: Erin Evans  
Fourth-grade students Gracie Piper, Haleigh Richardson and Brandon Sanders participated in Heard-Mixon Elementary School's first BodyWalk. Stations with information about various body parts and organs are set up around the gym this week to teach students how to lead healthy lifestyles.

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COVINGTON — Heard-Mixon Elementary School second-grader Austin King knows he shouldn't smoke so his lungs will stay healthy. He also knows he shouldn't drink too many soft drinks and that he should exercise as much as he can.

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And now, so do a lot of his classmates.

This week, Heard-Mixon students in kindergarten through fifth grade are participating in the BodyWalk, a 40-by-40-foot walkthrough exhibit representing the human body that was set up in the school's gym.

"This exhibit helps them to learn the importance of good nutrition and being physically active through interactive activities," said Donna Thompson, a physical education teacher at the school.

At the exhibit, students make their way through 10 stations to learn about various parts of the body including the teeth, stomach, small intestine, lungs, bones, muscles and skin. For about five minutes in each station, volunteer parents, teachers and paraprofessionals inform the students about the importance of the organ, give them tips and ask them questions and have them interact with visuals.

"I learned that your bones need you to work out so you can get strong," said second-grader Ryderrius Freeman after he went through the hourlong tour. "And you gotta drink water, play, exercise and don't drink sodas."

HealthMPowers, a nonprofit organization that travels to schools across Georgia, provided the BodyWalk as part of a three-year service grant awarded to the school last year after Thompson attended a school health training. The organization provides services to schools that serve a student population where more than 50 percent receive free or reduced lunch.

"Our main goal is to help kids make healthy choices through exercise and nutrition," said Debbie Myers of HealthMPowers.

This year, the organization is servicing about 70 schools across the state to provide health information and assessments to students and staff.

"As part of the grant, our teachers agreed to integrate 30 minutes per week of nutrition and/or physical activity as part of their lessons," Thompson said.

Some classes are simply learning health lessons through workbooks and others are using exercise DVDs. Thompson said teachers are having students read food labels to teach percentages in math, and some are participating in Karate Kid Math, in which students do jumping jacks, kicks and punches while reciting multiplication facts. And in music, third-, fourth- and fifth-graders are performing the musical "F.I.T. — Building Healthy Kids through Songs and Activities."

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“One teacher brought in cookies made from carrots and did a taste testing to teach healthier choices,” Thompson said. “The art teacher had the kids draw persuasive advertisements against high-sugar, high-Caffeine energy drinks.”

Even staff members are helping out — each morning, the school media specialist shows a DVD featuring the Organwise Guys like Hardy Heart and the Kidney Brothers to teach different health tips over the morning announcement show.

“As usual, we are all pulling together to focus on the needs of our children at Heard-Mixon,” Thompson said.

She hopes seeing visuals will help students get more out of what they are learning in their classrooms.

“This is definitely something different,” said paraprofessional Kristi Bellamy. “I hope they learn about taking care of themselves and being healthy.”

Livingston and West Newton elementary schools also will participate in the BodyWalk at their schools later this month.

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