Wellness Education Improves Healthy Choices among Sargent County Children (2016-2017)

The Situation
Childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years. Some researchers consider children to be “overfed” but “undernourished.” Obese children are at higher risk for cardiovascular disease, with 70 percent showing at least one risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Obesity also increases the risk for diabetes, stroke, cancer and osteoarthritis.

Extension Response
Cindy Klapperich led a series of five On the Move Junior lessons for second grade students in all three Sargent county schools, and a series of five On the Move to Better Health lessons for grade six students in all three Sargent county schools.

“On the Move Junior” (OTM-J) is a five-week school-based curriculum for second-graders, and On the Move to Better Health (OTM) is a five-week school-based curriculum for upper elementary students.

Both curricula are based on MyPlate, the current icon for good nutrition and aim to improve health habits of children related to their choices of healthy foods, beverages, and physical activity (exercise). In both programs, parents receive an educational newsletter each week.

Impacts
Student post-surveys noted the following positive behavior changes as a result of their participation in the programs:

- Eating more fruits and vegetables: 54% of sixth grade students, 78% of second grade students
- Increased physical activity (exercise): 64% of sixth grade students, 89% of second grade students
- 75% of sixth grade students are choosing healthier snacks, and 76% decreased their consumption of soda pop

According to parent post-surveys,

- 46% of second grade students are trying new foods, 33% are offering to help with food preparation, and 30% are asking for healthful snacks
- Parents read the weekly newsletters: 79% of parents of sixth graders, 64% of parents of second graders

Feedback
"It got me to make healthier choices. It made me not watch as much TV and video games." (student)

"I like that you let us try some of the whole grain cereals." (student)

"It gets you motivated to be healthier." (student)

Comments from teachers indicated students enjoyed:

- Hands on activities showing them how much of what we eat
- Tracking their progress and collecting beads
- The interactive piece during presentation of ideas

Public Value Statement
Improving health behaviors can increase quality of life and save millions of dollars in collective health-care costs for North Dakotans throughout their lifetime.

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