



Healthy Lifestyle Program a Hit in Maine Schools



Children at Wallagrass Elementary School learn about healthy eating at Race to Wellness Day with help from students from Fort Kent Community High School.

If you were to give a child the choice between eating a candy bar or apple, you would probably assume that most often the child would choose the candy bar. However, many Maine children may now think differently thanks to the 5-2-1-0 program. The 5-2-1-0 program is a partnership between EMHS' Youth Healthy Lifestyle Project and Let's Go! as a way of delivering consistent healthy lifestyle messaging throughout our communities. 5-2-1-0 stands for: five or more fruits and vegetables, two hours or less of recreational screen time, one hour or more of physical activity, and zero sugary drinks.

SAD #27, the northern most school district in Maine, recently introduced the 5-2-1-0 Program in their schools. Valerie Costello, school health coordinator for SAD #27 took on the challenge of implementing 5-2-1-0 into the schools after hearing the success that the Healthy Maine Partnership Healthy Aroostook experienced with the program. "I wanted to see the same success in the SAD #27 district," says Valerie, "I launched the program by leading physical activity and 5-2-1-0 assemblies at all four district elementary schools. The first half of the school year was spent simply getting the students familiar with the overall Let's Go! 5-2-1-0 program and the second half of the year was spent discussing the 5-2-1-0 message in greater detail."

During the second half of the school year, Valerie focused on one message per month. For example, in March she shared with the students the rationale for eating five fruits or vegetables a day and in April she discussed the two hours or less of recreational screen time in alignment with national TV Turnoff week that month. In fact, in April one elementary school held a Race to Wellness day where students engaged in fun activities such as a healthy olympics, hot potato, and making "fun and fruity" faces.

Valerie was pleased by how the students not only "lived" the messages at school, but outside of school as well. She explains, "The students have responded very positively to the program. I have students approaching me in local eateries and stores to show me that they are choosing water instead of soda. The students find the interventions very easy to follow and enjoy the messages I share with them when I lead the assemblies at each school."

Valerie is already looking forward to introducing the program to a new generation of students within SAD #27. When asked what advice she would have for other schools looking to implement 5-2-1-0 she said, "I would suggest other schools and communities start by creating a 5-2-1-0 team. It ensures sustainability of the program and also ensures the students are getting the messages from multiple individuals and not just one champion. The program is fun, has wonderful resources, and the support from EMHS has been phenomenal."



For more about EMHS' Youth Healthy Lifestyle Program and Let's Go! 5-2-1-0 visit www.5210healthylife.org.

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