

RECESS ROCKS at Macdonough with video

Thursday, September 9, 2010 1:18 AM EDT

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MIDDLETOWN — More than 200 students at Macdonough Elementary School celebrated the launch of a new national childhood obesity campaign Wednesday with food, fun and dancing.

The school, which was selected as the springboard for the national “Recess Rocks” campaign, first piloted the program back in 2005. Today, it has stretched across state lines and has reached thousands of children at schools across the nation.

The program has two components: a nationwide video that seeks solutions directly from children and adolescents and a program that reinvents recess by pairing dance instructors with schools to increase students’ activity in and outside the classroom.

Until Wednesday, the program had only been implemented in Connecticut schools but has since reached to California where Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger proclaimed Sept. 8 “Recess Rocks Day.”

“The childhood obesity epidemic is spreading at an alarming rate. As a result, September has been declared National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month. The Recess Rocks campaign supports this national effort,” said Dr. J. Nwando Olayiwola, the Community Health Center, Inc.’s chief medical officer and a family practice physician.

“We’re really trying to have students be proponents of this campaign in their schools, in their homes and in their communities. I think empowering the kids will help them (in the future).”

In the last 30 years, childhood obesity has more than tripled, according to reports from the Center of Disease Control. Today, one in three children is obese or overweight leading to a higher risk for cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

According to Olayiwola, there are many factors which can contribute to childhood obesity, one in particular is socio-economic status.

“It really starts at the level of mother and infant,” she said. “Often times parents are too busy to cook or cannot afford healthy meals.”

Initially launched four years ago by the CHC, the “Healthy Macdonough Project” focused on one of the poorest areas in the city of Middletown. It targeted high-risk children ages five to 11 enrolled in kindergarten through fifth grade and focused on engaging parents, children and community partners in healthy nutrition and physical activities. The project also encouraged parents to engage as advocates for policy changes that make healthy nutrition options more available to their children.

Since then, administrators and faculty at Macdonough have held regular block parties and the school has become a host for the annual Summer Lunch Program, which provides free meals to children during the school recess.

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