

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2015 NC Cooperative Extension Yancey County

Students Meet Competencies for Healthy Living with Help from EFNEP

In North Carolina, end-of-grade testing is administered to assess student achievement in meeting specific grade level competencies as specified in the state's Core and Essential Standards Course of Studies. In 5th grade, besides the competencies of reading and math, students are also tested against the science competencies related to healthful living.

This year, in an effort to competently address the healthy living standard, one Yancey County science teacher reached out to the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) for its expertise. She knew that in the six-week series of lessons it offered as school enrichment, EFNEP would teach the 5th grade students at her school MyPlate's basic nutrition concepts and how to use the Nutrition Facts Label to make healthy food choices. Additionally, students would learn how to incorporate those food choices into meal and snack plans that would ensure their nutrient requirements were met. Taste test opportunities would allow the students to discover new foods and the nutritional value of adding a variety of foods to their daily diets.

EFNEP taught the students about the digestive system—the process by which food is taken in, broken down and its nutrients absorbed for use by the body. They learned a healthy digestive system contributes to a healthy body.

To encourage the children to become more active, EFNEP taught that getting the 60 minutes of physical activity needed each day could be fun. Choosing between three different kinds of activity—aerobic, strength building, and flexibility would offer variety in games and activities they chose to play, and build healthy bodies at the same time.

The teacher was certain that by participating in the EFNEP series, all 5th graders at her school would understand that combining good nutrition with physical activity was key to maintaining good digestive health and, in turn, building a healthy body. By having a firm understanding of the science, she felt they would do well on the questions related to healthy living on their end-of-grade tests. To test her theory, she administered practice tests to her students that were sanctioned and scored by the state.

The teacher was thrilled when she received the results. She stated, "Because of EFNEP, the students had not only done extremely well in answering detailed questions about the digestive system, they also excelled on other science-based questions. For example, EFNEP's teaching them that ingredients found on the Nutrition Facts Label ending in "ose" meant they were sugars, allowed the children to correctly answer other science-based questions on the test.

The teacher's theory was correct. EFNEP had helped the 5th graders at her school understand and relate the competencies of healthy eating and physical activity to their everyday lives.

References:

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Students Learn to Make Healthy Choices

American children today are being given more and more responsibility for making their own food choice decisions. Many times the choices they make are less nutritious than their parents and teachers would hope. Recent research that poor food choices made at an early age can result in mental and emotional health problems and a failure to thrive academically when young. It can also lead to health risks such as heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes in adulthood.

In an effort to lessen those possible health risks for Yancey County children, the public school system partnered with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) to teach children in elementary grades how to make smart food choices. Throughout their EFNEP experience, the children learned MyPlate's healthy eating concepts and participated in hands-on learning activities that included planning and preparing healthy meals and snacks. Knowing family involvement is a mandatory component of ensuring healthy food selection, EFNEP included the parents in each lesson. Letters and educational materials were sent home that provided coaching in how to further facilitate the teaching of sound eating practices at home.

At the end of each six-lesson series, EFNEP asked the teachers what changes they had noticed as a result of their student's participation in the program. At the end of the school year, 89% of the teachers shared that they had observed their students eating a greater variety of foods at school, and 67% stated they had evidence the students were now talking more with their parents about healthy eating than they had before participating in EFNEP. One teacher stated a student had recently shared with her that he'd encouraged his mom to make healthier choices while shopping. Another noted family involvement in food selection was evident now more than before because her students were bringing more nutritious snacks to school. That statement was verified by a teacher who commented, "I overheard a few students talking about the healthy food on their plates."

These examples made it clear that EFNEP, working together with Yancey County Schools and students' families, had succeeded in empowering elementary school children to make wise food choice decisions. By learning at an early age to be mindful of their food choices, these children will reduce potential health risks and positively impact their chances of enjoying a long and healthy life.

Resources: Retrieved 4/13/2015

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