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## Seventh-graders learn to count calories

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Kat Alphin, a physical education teacher at Springfield Middle School, helps seventh-grader Mason Cox during a MATCH class at the school Wednesday.

DREW C. WILSON | TIMES

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**By Drew C. Wilson**

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Seventh-grader Kamryn Thaby understands the relationship between the calories she takes in and calories she burns away.

“I’m like overweight, and I want to eat healthier and do more cardio and stuff so that I can be at the weight I want to be,” Kamryn said.

Kamryn is one of about 800 seventh-graders in Wilson County who are participating in MATCH, a national childhood obesity intervention program. MATCH is an acronym for Motivating Adolescents with Technology to Choose Health.

“The more calories that you work out and burn, the more you can eat,” Kamryn said. “I tend to eat a lot without exercising much, so if you consume a lot of calories but lose the weight, then you will end up being at a good equal balance of your weight.”

The idea is to establish healthy eating and exercise habits at an early age so that when the children are adults, obesity will not be a problem.

The program was started three years ago with a grant through the Healthcare Foundation of Wilson.

Kat Alphin, a health and physical education teacher at Springfield Middle School, said the program has really made a difference.

At the very beginning of the year, students did a fitness assessment by taking their weight and height and calculating their body mass index.

Seventh-grader Dylan Williford said the program helps students find their daily caloric intake and how healthy they are being with the eating habits and exercise.

“My goals are to lose a bit more, to stop eating as much as I do, to eat healthier than I do and to be more active,” Williford said.

Alphin said at the end of the year, students will do a post-fitness assessment where they will see where their weight is and what their height is and where they grew.

The MATCH program will also gather information that will be part of research conducted at East Carolina University.



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“A cool thing about the program is that it has good lessons online that stay updated,” Alphin said. “It’s really good information and materials. Right now, we are on energy balance, and we are talking about caloric intake and expenditure and how important it is.”

All of the kids in seventh grade were given a pedometer to count steps in regular life and during challenges in the gym.

“We are teaching them that 2,000 steps is a mile, and in one mile, you are burning 100 calories,” Alphin said. “So they are not only thinking about the caloric expenditure part of it but also the consumption and just being able to think about what they are putting in their body, what fuels their body to help them go.”

Alphin’s classes have been setting goals for physical education with steps and then the different activities that they are doing.

“I have seen a lot of results with weight,” Alphin said. “Obviously, some kids gain, but there are some who are losing and there are some that are maintaining. I think the biggest thing for middle school is understanding where they are. It’s not just about where they are on the scale because muscle obviously weighs more than fat. Just helping them be mindful about what they are intaking and consuming and their body is going to fluctuate based on that.”

“MATCH is a program that goes with health, but it also goes in the concepts for PE as well because you are moving. Its hand in hand. We are talking about energy balance.”

Alphin and six other health and physical education teachers were recognized by the Wilson County Board of Education Monday for the advances in the MATCH curriculum. The teachers included David Lyndon, Eddie Reel, Brent Pearson, Janice Gaetano, Lydia Crandall and Joanna Farriss.

“The program focuses on nutrition education and increased physical activity,” said Lane Mills, Wilson County Schools superintendent. “It empowers students to make healthy choices, and studies have shown that the program has a significant impact on weight management for students while they are in the program and in the future.”



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