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'Access to the kids'

Written by [Kelley Atherton, The Triplicate](#) February 01, 2010 10:34 am

Schools look to push harder for healthier kids



There's no simple solution to the childhood obesity problem in Del Norte County.

School officials are already employing the resources they have:

- Funding from the Network for a Healthy California puts nutrition educators in classrooms almost every school day.
- Schools follow state and federal guidelines to serve foods that are nutrient-rich and low in fat.
- Students are required to get exercise in P.E. class.

"We have so many duties," said Del Norte County Unified School District Superintendent Jan Moorehouse. "But, we have the access to the kids."

Still, there's only so much that can be done at school, she said.

Now school officials are hoping for help from the California Endowment, a private foundation that chose Del Norte to receive funding as part of its "Building Healthy Communities" program.

The foundation will be soon be asking for specific grant proposals.

Some of the school district's ideas for the money include doing more with the gardens at local schools, building exercise facilities so kids have a place to go when it's raining and extending nutrition education so it reaches children's families.

The California Endowment is interested in helping improve the health of Del Norte's children, Moorehouse said, especially in fighting the obesity problem.

"On the horizon, there is help," she said.

After representatives from the California Endowment saw the body mass index (BMI) data that school nurses collected, "they said, 'this is one thing we would really like to do with you,'" Moorehouse said.

The data showed that close to half of the hundreds of students whose BMI was checked were

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either overweight or obese.

The top three desired "outcomes" that arose from a California Endowment brainstorming session in early January were preventing illness, youth development and making sure that every Del Norther has access to a primary care doctor.

Educators also want the entire community to hear the message they're imparting to students about the importance of eating healthy foods and getting plenty of exercise.



A student cuts carrots in a Sustainable Living class at Crescent Elk Middle School, where students grow and eat their own vegetables. Educators would like to extend such programs to students' homes. File photo

Nutrition educators send information home to parents and school nurses inform them if their children are of an unhealthy weight.

Network for a Healthy California staff members periodically organize community events like providing a healthy snack during movie night at the Family Resource Center, said project coordinator Deborah Kravitz, but she would like to do more.

Meanwhile, there are various projects in the works at local schools to get students more physical activity.

The Measure A bond levy that voters passed in November 2008 is going to pay for a new gym at Smith River Elementary. The current one is out of date and also used as a cafeteria.

Sunset Continuation High School is in the process of getting a walking track.

In addition, the high school is applying for a grant to offer outdoor activities like mountain biking, and has already partially built a ropes course.

The idea is elementary students would come to Sunset to get some exercise and learn about outdoor recreation from high school students, who would be learning about a potential career.

Due to budget cuts from the state, the school district laid off an elementary P.E. teacher who traveled around to different schools. That position could be reinstated in the future.

"We've changed the diet, increased the activity level and made an effort with the nutrition program," Moorehouse said. "What else can we do in our schools?"

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