

UkiahDailyJournal.com

Drinking it in

By **CAROLE BRODSKY**

Updated: 05/05/2010 08:22:01 AM PDT



Students participate in beverage replacement campaign

It has been nine weeks since Grace Hudson School sixth-graders in Mr. Thomas' class received brightly colored water bottles from the Mendocino County School Network for a Healthy California. Program Director Terry Nieves and Elly Hollis-Morton - nutrition education instructor - provided the bottles and a lot of information about beverage choices to five classrooms in the county as part of a nine-week project for the students.

As part of their "Rethink Your Drink" campaign, Nieves and Hollis-Morton provided surveys to the students at the outset of the experiment, asking kids what kinds of beverages they drank, the frequency

and in what quantities. They were educated about the importance of drinking water, about making better beverage choices and about the importance of avoiding or reducing the amount of beverages containing sugar, high fructose corn syrup, artificial ingredients and caffeine.

Last week, Hollis-Morton and Nieves visited Mr. Thomas' classroom to ask the students about their progress. They were also asked to re-take their drink survey.

Students had their water bottles prominently displayed on their desks. After some brief comments from Hollis-Morton, the students were eager to report the results of their experiment. Asked how many students were drinking more water, 32 students - the entire class - raised their hands.

"I wasn't missing sodas at all," said one. "I've stopped drinking

sodas altogether," said another"

"I'm really cautious about what I'm drinking now," said one student. "After you showed us how much sugar was in soda, I stopped." Nieves points out that the amount of sugar in juices and sodas is so high it can be measured in teaspoons - with 17 teaspoons in a regular Coke, 10 teaspoons in a large pouch of Capri Sun and nine teaspoons in a 20-ounce original Gatorade.

Hollis-Morton asked if any students were able to influence their family members about their drink choices. "I told my dad, but he just drinks Monsters all the time," said one boy, with laughter from the classroom. "Most of my family chooses water over sodas now," said another. "My mom didn't realize how much sugar was in fruit juice."

Advertisement

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

UkiahDailyJournal.com

Students were surprisingly savvy when asked why sweetened beverages are marketed to kids. "They know we'll drink them because they are sweet and they taste good," said one.

"The drinks are addicting!" shouted one boy. "High fructose corn syrup is cheap, so companies make more money when they use it," said a girl. "The sugar and caffeine makes you amped up. They don't quench your thirst, so you want another."

Nieves corroborated the students' comments, saying that reducing the consumption of sweetened drinks could help with the unprecedented surge in youth obesity and diabetes. "The average American consumes almost 100 pounds of added sugar every year," Nieves noted. "Caffeine pulls water out of your body," Hollis-Morton clarified.

"Where does high fructose corn syrup come from?" Thomas asked his class. "Farmers," answer the students. "Of course we want to encourage people to farm, but do we want to encourage farmers to grow corn for these ingredients?" he asked the kids. "If we sell syrup that can be added to all kinds of foods, people get used to that sweet edge."

"My mom used to have a Coke every morning before work," said a student. "After I told her about this program, she got rid of all her sodas." "Now I read the labels on all my drinks," said another.

Hollis-Morton passed around a photo of what she calls "hydration stations" at an Oakland elementary school. In their cafeteria, long faucets, similar to fast-food soda fountains are providing cold, filtered water to the student body. Outside near a drinking fountain, another special faucet has been installed. These are designed to be easily used in conjunction with water bottles, making it simple for kids to

readily choose filtered water over sugary alternatives. "We would like to try this here," said Hollis-Morton. "We think you're the best people to ask for this kind of help. We hope that you will write letters to the Ukiah Educational Foundation and ask that they create our own Hydration Station at your school," she told the class.

"Water fountains are often dirty and not suited for bottles," said Nieves. "A British study has shown that kids have better test scores when they are hydrated." She hopes that the enthusiasm of Mr. Thomas' class will be felt by the foundation, and added that even in these rough economic times, the argument for student access to clean, accessible filtered water is critical.

Nieves was having an "out of the mouths of babes" moment after listening to the students. "We've brought this program to almost every qualified school in the county," she says. "You guys could teach this class!"

For more information, visit www.northcoastnutrition.org and click on "Rethink Your Drink Campaign."

10 ways to drink more water

By Mr. Thomas' sixth-grade students

Choose water at mealtimes

Stop buying sodas

Dilute fruit juices with water

Add fruit, cucumbers to water

Advertisement

UkiahDailyJournal.com

Make fruit smoothies

Locate drinking fountains

Take your water bottle everywhere

Get more than one water bottle- they're fun!

Eat more fresh fruits and vegetables

Drink unsweetened tea

Advertisement

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™