

Nationwide fitness program targets childhood obesity

By DANIEL SCHWAB

Almost a million of Canada's elementary school students are improving their health with a little help from Weston Bakeries.

The Wonder Fresh Fitness Challenge has students of 2,400 schools across the country participating in an eight-week program to increase physical activity and combat childhood obesity.

The program began in October and is running until the second week of December.

Locally, two schools have been asked to participate – Colchester North Central in Gesto and Holy Name in Essex.

“One of the biggest issues facing students has been childhood obesity,” said Weston Bakeries National Promotions Manager Julian Franklin. “We needed to get involved in a program that would help get kids active. Schools have been looking for a program like this that doesn't cost them anything.”

Weston Bakeries worked with MIR Communications to create the first Wonder

Fresh Fitness Challenge three years ago. MIR Communications worked directly with school boards to help “bring the vision to life,” Franklin said.

“We approached the schools with a letter and if they were interested, we'd send an information package that shows them the exercises,” he added.

The package also comes with a Move to Your Groove music CD that students can listen to while exercising.

Franklin said the program also provides a creative way for teachers in Ontario to implement the 20 minutes of daily physical activity (DPA) for students as mandated by the Ministry of Education.

Last year, Canadian students accumulated nearly 24 million minutes of exercise during the eight-week fitness challenge – a number Franklin is hoping will be exceeded this year.

“It's not about hard, stringent exercises that tax anybody,” he said. “It's about having fun and moving to music and having a good time. And at the end of the day, it might also help them

continue to exercise...every little bit helps.”

Students at Colchester North Central are getting their share of exercise under a DPA program organized by Izzy Oozeer, head of the school's physical education department.

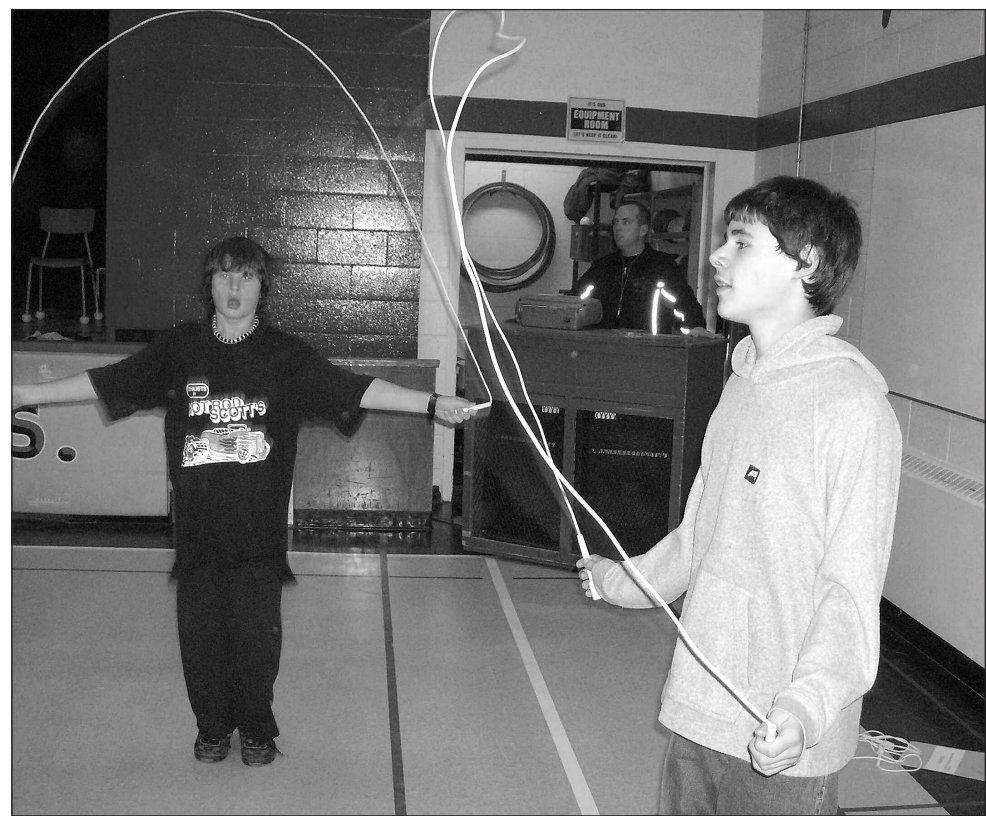
Oozeer was part of a committee that worked with the Greater Essex County District School Board to implement a local DPA program in September.

Now, students at the school are participating in 50 fitness activities including “scissor hops”, “swinging leg lifts” and “flutter kicks.”

“If kids start exercising at a young age, it'll be ingrained when they become adults,” Oozeer said of the new program. “When you look at our society, with a lot of kids sitting around watching TV and playing videogames, this is helping them out.”

Grade 7-8 teacher Kevin Klassen said many of the DPA exercises are designed to keep kids interested and can be done in the classroom.

“I think most kids are interested,” Klassen said.



Colchester North Central School Grade 8 students Josh Andrews, left, and Judah Bastien jump rope during 20 minutes of Daily Physical Activity last week. Students of schools across Ontario have been participating in DPA program since it was introduced by the Ministry of Education in September.

“It's a change from doing math or English. The key is variety.”

Klassen also said students have a say in which exercises they will be doing.

Part of the appeal of the DPA program for kids at Holy Name School is that it's not competitive, said

Health and Phys Ed. teacher Sean Ryan.

“Some kids shy away from competition,” Ryan said. “But this program is not sport-based or competitive, it's just about kids being active.”

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