

Elementary school students have appetite for healthy habits

By Alisha George, Times Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, May 6, 2011 12:15 am

MOUNT AIRY - George Anderson said he used to eat a lot of junk food, including meals from McDonald's and potato chips. But that all changed when he signed the "It's Crunch Time!" pledge.

"I replaced it with apples, carrots, broccoli and bananas," said George, 9, a third-grader at Mount Airy Elementary School.

An "It's Crunch Time!" rally was held at the Mount Airy Elementary School Thursday to celebrate an initiative to promote healthy eating among children and their families. The program at both Mount Airy and Parr's Ridge elementary schools, which began April 11 and ends June 13, focuses on increasing children's fruit and vegetable consumption and decrease consumption of sugary drinks, junk food and fast food.

The Crunch Time message aims to convey the urgency in which families should make changes and to encourage people to crunch on fruits and vegetable at every meal.

"It's time to make some noise, Carroll County," said Erica Zamensky, the program coordinator from The Partnership for a Healthier Carroll County.

During the rally Thursday, students held up signs and cheered while talking about what the program has meant to them.

Zamensky said the pilot event had a 32 percent participation rate. The program has been successful because healthy eating habits are being encouraged at both school and at home, and children can monitor their eating on a calendar provided by The Partnership.

For those who participated, parents completed pre- and post-pledge surveys, allowing The Partnership to collect and measure change in food choices as a result of the program.

The program motivated parents to talk to their children about healthy eating and provided sobering information about topics such as childhood obesity. Sometimes, because of time constraints and the fight children may put up to steer clear of healthy choices, parents would avoid talking about and enforcing healthy eating, Zamensky said.

"It's given parents a much needed tool to teach good nutrition," she said.

Third-grader Jessica Lamb, 9, said she has not only changed her eating habits for the better, but has learned a lot because of the program.

"I realized that junk food is not good because it's greasy and there's fat in it," she said.

Every week, The Partnership would go to the schools and give out stickers to students who were caught eating fruits or vegetables during lunch.

Third-grader Jason Southworth, 9, proudly wore a sticker for eating corn during lunch.

Zamensky said that she has heard feedback from parents that say children have asked for more healthy snacks in their lunch because of the stickers.

Statistics from The Partnership said adults and children in Carroll County are not eating enough fruits and vegetables and consuming fast food about four times a week on average, she said.

"So this was created as a platform for family change," Zamensky said.

The pilot at the two Mount Airy Elementary Schools is a way for the organization to iron out glitches, she said, but The Partnership is hoping to eventually launch it as an annual springtime program in county elementary schools.

"We're off to a terrific start," she said.

Reach staff writer Alisha George at 410-857-7876 or alisha.george@carrollcountytimes.com.



Ken Koons/Staff Photo

It's Crunch Time!

Mount Airy Elementary School students celebrate during It's Crunch Time! rally for healthy eating at the school on Thursday afternoon.



Ken Koons/Staff Photo

It's Crunch Time!

Mount Airy Elementary School Principal Debbie Bunker asks students about healthy eating habits during the It's Crunch Time! rally for healthy eating at the school on Thursday afternoon.