

Washing germs away: Parr's Ridge receives national award for health curriculum

By Penny Riordan, Times Staff Writer

MOUNT AIRY — First-grader Abby Komiske examined her just-washed hands for any remaining white powder residue.

"I think I got it all off," she said to her health teacher, Ashley Bacon, who had just finished pouring white powder called germ powder on every student's hands in her class at Parr's Ridge Elementary School.

But a few minutes later, after Bacon walked around the darkened classroom with a black light, a host of blotches of the germ powder appeared on Abby's hands.

She was not alone. Squeals of disgust and cries of "it's still there" erupted among her fellow classmates, all of whom apparently needed a refresher course in hand washing.

The white powder, which did not contain germs, was a tool Bacon used to help her class see how proper hand washing was the real way to keep germs from spreading.

"It really hits home to show them, 'I didn't wash my hands the right way,'" Bacon said of the lesson, which she has given to all of the school's kindergartners and first-graders this year.

The lesson is one of the reasons Parr's Ridge received a national award for its integrated approach to health curriculum.

The school, which has students in kindergarten through second grade, was one of the two highest-scoring schools in the U.S. that applied for the Blue Apple Health Education award program. The awards are sponsored by the American Association for Health Education.

"I was looking at the application, and I realized we do all this," Bacon said, of the criteria for the awards program. She applied for the grant in November. Last week, representatives from the association came to visit the school, where they presented the award.

While Bacon is the health teacher for the school, she is not the only one who uses health lessons in her class.

In kindergarten, teachers have done units where students identify healthy foods and unhealthy foods. Some second-grade teachers have also used book series for reading that promote exercise.

"In any way they can, they try to hit health [topics] in their classroom," Bacon said.

Also during Project ACES, the countywide fitness contest held in October, more than 80 percent of the students participate.

Bacon also takes the time to tweak and improve the county health curriculum, as she has helped write curriculum in the past year.

The germ lesson has become a popular lesson for students, but it is also an important one for them to learn. After she used the black light to show the students the "germs" still on their hands, Bacon took the time to demonstrate proper hand washing.

For every class that day, Bacon thoroughly washed her own hands in front of them and had them follow her lead at their desks.

"See how I am getting soap on the back of my hands, the front of my hands and in between my fingers," she said. "I didn't see anyone's hands really foamy, soapy and bubbly. That's what they need to look like."

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Ken Koons/Staff Photo

Parr's Ridge Elementary School health teacher Ashley Bacon uses a black light reflective powder to simulate, for first-graders, how germs stay on people's hands.