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# Texas medical students bring produce message to kids

Published on 10/12/2009 11:15am By Andy Nelson

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Schoolchildren in Dallas recently got a break from reading, writing and arithmetic to learn about something else that could ensure their future well-being: eating fruits and vegetables.

Students from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School spoke to third-, fourth- and fifth-graders in the Dallas Independent School District the week of Sept. 28, stressing the important role produce consumption plays in long-term health.

The two-person teams of third-year medical students spoke to students, then passed out electronic clickers so kids could anonymously answer questions about fruits and vegetables, said Linda Michalsky, an assistant professor at the medical school's Center for Human Nutrition and the outreach program's coordinator.

While the main goal of the program is to teach kids about good eating habits, Southwestern benefits, too, Michalsky said. The data collected through the kids' clickers will be analyzed by her and other researchers.

"It's a win-win. Asking questions is a good way to get their attention, and it's good to get them thinking about fruits and vegetables," she said. "The research is just a bonus."

The effort by the medical school dovetails with the American Medical Association's recommendation that kids eat more fruits and vegetables to help prevent obesity, Michalsky said.

Getting the message out early is crucial, she said.

"Those who eat well when they're young eat well when they get to be adults," she said.

If more funding becomes available, Michalsky said she'd like to follow up the medical students' visits with a program to help students take charge of their own produce consumption. Stickers could be one possible way kids could track their daily fruit and veggie intake, she said.

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