

LAKELAND SCHOOLS: Junking the junk food Elementary schools exercise,

By Adriane Tillman

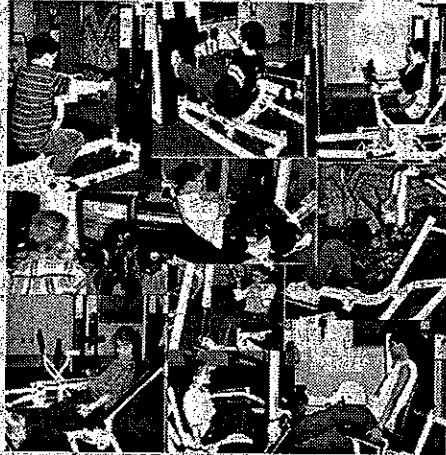
Cookies at lunch and chocolate ice cream after supper? Not for some students at Ben Franklin and Thomas Jefferson elementary schools who pledged to give up junk food for a week.

Students will replace high fructose candy with apples and chocolate pudding for graham crackers. Participating first through fifth-graders will sign a pledge form that vows a week without sweets, to be co-signed by parents and teachers. The children will document the healthy snacks they consume.

Ben Franklin will forgo junk food the week of March 26, while Thomas Jefferson finished their third year of participation last week. The program is sponsored by the Westchester County Department of Health. Last year, approximately 35 schools and 17,000 students in the county went junk-free.

Enter the Energy Room

At Ben Franklin, eating healthy isn't only about maintaining the body; it's



Ben Franklin students pump iron and learn about the body in one of the nation's few Energy Rooms.

also about exercising the mind. The school's innovative Energy Room works to emphasize that correlation.

The Energy Room is essentially a 15-machine gym with a variety of

learning tools to teach students about their body function and system. Students can monitor their pulse, log their number of repetitions and graph the strength they gain. At computer stations, they learn about their cardiovascular and muscular system. Before New York State testing, fourth graders work out to increase their energy and connect their mind and body, said Principle Patricia McIlvenny.

"It gives you more energy and makes you feel good. It helps you be smarter," said fourth-grader Jimmy Farrington.

Fellow fourth-grader Gino Cassese said he likes the Energy Room because it prevents someone from playing video games all the time, and helps him stretch for gymnastics. James Schwerner said working out provides him with more energy to play football. Matt Peticcione said the Energy Room helps him calm down.

The Energy Room is an anomaly to the area, as the only one in the Lakeland School District, and one of a handful in the nation, according to Ben

refuse sweets

Franklin's website. To view the Energy Room, visit: <http://www.lakeland-schools.us/bf/rcarcova/EnergyRoomWebQuestSN/index.htm>

A sweet time

Passing on junk food at Ben Franklin is apparently a popular, exciting week. The school even won an award for the most no-junk food participants in the past two years with 69 percent of the 434 student body pledging last year.

The effects of the sweet-free week also seem to carry on into the rest of the school year.

"After that week you feel so much better, you only want to eat a little bit," Schwerner said.

The nurse at Thomas Jefferson said that childhood obesity is a national problem, even at the elementary level.

"Habits are started earlier in life. We want to correct them," said the nurse, Mary Beth Guyett.

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