

Power Hour: Healthy School Initiative

*Morris Bye Elementary School
Coon Rapids, Minnesota*

Concerned about the rising national trend of childhood obesity, Morris Bye Elementary School created an after-school program called Power Hour to improve the health of students and their families through better nutrition and increased physical activity. The school offered two six-week sessions to third, fourth, and fifth graders to teach strategies for healthier living.

The Power Hour was supported by the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and publicized in articles in the school and community newspapers. The district's Community Education Department printed informational fliers and registration forms. To pump up the student body and promote the initiative and its goals, Morris Bye held an assembly sharing important information about the food pyramid and healthy food choices. Following the assembly, the school sent registration forms and informational fliers home with third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students. Registration was accepted on a first come, first served basis, and participants were asked to pay a \$5 fee to join the program.

Though Morris Bye originally wanted to hold the program during the regular school day, academic scheduling restrictions made that impossible. The sessions ran for one hour immediately after the school day ended. Each session included both classroom and physical components designed to engage and excite participants to make healthy choices. In the lecture sessions, a health educator from Allina Health Care Systems spoke about nutrition, diet, and exercise. The physical component of the program includ-

ed running, jumping rope, and other activities. The health educator gave students a pedometer, jump rope, or other exercise equipment. They were encouraged to take these items home to share with their families. The sessions ended with a healthy snack to model what was taught. Parents of participants were sent information designed to reinforce healthy lifestyles at home.

Morris Bye received positive feedback from parents about the initiative. One parent reported, "My fourth grade daughter is actively reading food labels of the food we prepare at home or purchase for snacks!"

Through its after-school health initiative, Morris Bye is doing its part to address the national epidemic of obesity and inactivity. Its students and families now have a better understanding of how food and exercise choices affect overall health. Students know how to read food labels, interpret the food pyramid, and exercise effectively. Next year, in addition to continuing the Power Hour program, the school will offer returning participants a "Phase II" program to build on the first year's material.

*Susan Israelson, Volunteer Service Coordinator
Rita Heitman, Social Worker
(763) 506-3702
Rita.Heitman@anoka.k12.mn.us*