

Walk a Mile with a Smile

*Roger Wolcott Early Childhood Center
Windsor, Connecticut*

Everyone knows that an apple a day keeps the doctor away – but can an apple tree in a school lobby make an entire student body healthier? The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) from Roger Wolcott Early Childhood Center thinks so. Last September, the ATP partnered with the physical education teacher and a new school principal to teach preschoolers and kindergartners the importance of healthy choices.

The program was launched in response to a health and wellness goal set by the ATP for the 07-08 school year. Teachers and parents decided that children at the school should learn the importance of making healthy snack and exercise choices. The ATP put their plan into action by implementing age-appropriate activities for young children to learn about health and wellness.

Teachers and ATP members kicked off the program by announcing their intention to construct a large paper orchard in the center's foyer and asking parents to help. Parents and teachers then gathered in the lobby, cutting plant parts and stapling them to bulletin boards. Each class had its own apple tree, complete with branches and leaves, but devoid of any fruit. Fliers went home to parents announcing the program and offering healthy snack ideas.

As the program officially began, students received a journal to take home and record two healthy activities per day, such as eating a healthy snack or participating in some kind of physical exercise. At the end of two weeks, students returned their journals to their teachers. Every student who successfully completed the program received a paper apple, with their name, to hang from their class tree.

Toward the end of the program, students participated in an interactive walk during their gym class. The PE teacher created the activity, complete with clues and rhymes to help the students move from one location to

another. As an added reward for the increasingly healthy youngsters, the Principal attended each PE class and led the interactive walk. At the end of the program, parents and school staff provided the children fresh cut apple slices, donated by a local orchard.

Approximately 250 students participated in the project, which boasted a 70% successful completion rate. Teachers measured success by tabulating the number of apples on the paper trees in the foyer.

The total cost for the entire project was only \$50. Funds came from the school's Family Resource Center budget. The ATP plans to repeat the event next year, pending approval at their end of year ATP meeting. School staff members envision only minor changes for next year's activity. They hope to advertise the event with a few more flyers, and to create an alternate indoor course for the interactive walk, in case of rain.

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