

Food fun takes over Macomber School

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Photos by Kim Ledoux/Standard-Times special FoodPlay, a national touring show about nutrition, entertained and taught students at Macomber School in Westport on Thursday.

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WESTPORT — They're things not usually allowed in a school cafeteria: throwing, juggling and even dancing with food.

But they were all OK the other day at the Alice A. Macomber Primary School.

Especially since the food in question was plastic.

Performers from FoodPlay, a nationally touring Emmy Award winning nutrition show, came to Westport to teach the kids what's good and what isn't when it comes to eating.

"There is more salt in a fast food apple pie than in a whole order of fries. ... Apples are already sweet, but they add more sugar anyway," said Coach, one of the characters in the show.

With a cast of acrobatic characters and catchy songs that could compete with any children's television show, the Hatfield-based FoodPlay is the brainchild of nutritionist Barbara Storper, who developed the program to appeal specifically to younger children.

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"We have to fight fire with fire," she said. "For our messages to be effective, we need to use similar techniques that advertisers use in order to make healthy foods and healthy practices fun and cool for kids. And there's nothing like the power and magic of live theater to get kids excited and motivated to make their choices healthy ones."

During the show, a bumbling character named Janey Junkfood learns all about healthy eating habits and exercise.

"There are 10 teaspoons of sugar in one can of soda! That's gross," Janey said.

"The average kid drinks 600 cans of soda a year. At a dollar each, that would be \$600. I could have spent that on a mountain bike or an Xbox 360," she said with comical exaggeration.

FoodPlay focuses on kindergarten through Grade 5 students to reach them before they develop bad habits, said stage manager Renee Lynnette.

According to Macomber school nurse Tracy Pereira, students regularly receive messages about good nutrition through classroom lessons and "Fruit and Veggie Days," when they receive a sticker for buying or bringing fruits and vegetables for lunch.

There is also the "Take 10" program where staff lead students in physical activity for 10 minutes out of each lunch period.

"The activities tie in to what they are learning, such as marching a certain number of paces, or the students move when the teacher calls out an action word," Pereira said, adding that if the message is presented in a fun way, students are more likely to pay attention.

During FoodPlay, for example, preschoolers and kindergarteners were captivated and enthusiastically participated throughout the entire 45-minute presentation.

"My favorite part was when Janey Junkfood came out with googly eyes," kindergartener Jesse Skov said.

For schoolmate Ben Poitras, a trip to a fast food restaurant will never be the same.

"I ate one of those (fast food) pies once. I brushed my teeth after. You have to do that because of all the sugar, and you can't eat too many of them," he said.

Thursday's show was sponsored by the school's parent teacher organization.

For more information on the FoodPlay, go to www.foodplay.com.