Siegel High students focus on health

Rather than working out, Siegel High wellness students spent a recent class period learning how food choices can have an impact on their lives.

The school’s wellness department arranged a health fair, enlisting the help of representatives from the Rutherford County Family YMCA, American Heart Association, Rutherford County Ag Extension and MTSU.

Wellness teacher Dewanna Bandy said one of the main reasons for the fair is because November is Diabetes Awareness Month. According to the American Diabetes Association, 25.8 million children and adults in the U.S. have diabetes and an estimated 79 million were considered prediabetic.
“I think a large part of the diabetic epidemic is because of a lack of physical activity, just as much as it can be hereditary. Reading food labels isn’t just something they practice in class. They should be doing it at home,” said Bandy, who holds a master’s degree in public health.

During their class period, students visited different stations, including one manned by students from MTSU’s dietetics program. There, students strapped on a 25-pound weighted vest and challenged to perform as many jumping jacks as they could before they got tired.

“It’s the equivalent of eating one fast-food meal every day for a year,” said MTSU student Justin Hayes.

After completing close to 80 jumping jacks, Siegel sophomore Thalia Arenivas called it quits.

“I don’t really think about what I eat when I eat fast food,” Arenivas admitted.

Hayes shared with many students the journey he went through to lose 125 pounds in 18 months three years ago.

“I weighed 330 pounds then. I went to the doctor and he tried to put me on blood pressure and cholesterol medicine. I knew once you went on that medicine, it was hard to come off,” Hayes said. “The doctor thought I was a Type 2 (adult onset) diabetic, but once I started counting carbs and walking, monitoring my soda intake, they found out I had Type 1 (juvenile onset) diabetes.

“I was already majoring in dietetics, but that really helped me want to help other people,” he added.

Misty Lane-Watkins and Candace Strickland from the local agricultural extension office talked to students about the amount of sugar in their favorite beverages. Various beverages, including canned lemonade, juice pouches, flavored waters and more were displayed alongside clear containers containing the same amount of sugar.

“If you drink juice pouches, that’s about 7 grams of sugar in each one, which is your maximum daily allowance,” Lane-Watkins said.

Sophomore Courtney Byrd made the decision to consume fewer calories after a foot injury forced her to wear a walking boot.

“I can’t exercise like I normally would, so I’m not eating like I normally would. A lot of teens aren’t concerned about what they eat. They think they’ll just bounce back if they gain weight after an injury or something,” Byrd said.