

## Elementary students learn about healthy choices

Written by Wauneta Breeze  
Thursday, 04 April 2013 16:13 -

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**The W-P second grade class listens to Denise Ringenberg with Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department as she shares information on making healthy choices as part of the TOUCAN program during their P.E. class taught by Joseph Frecks.**

**By Sheri Hink-Wagner**

**The Wauneta Breeze**

Last Wednesday, March 27 Wauneta-Palisade Kindergarten, first, second, third and fourth graders had a special treat in their physical education classes. Elementary students participated in the TOUCAN (Teaching Our yoUth Choices: Activities and Nutrition).

The program was brought to the school by the Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) and taught by Denise Ringenberg and Helena Janousek with SWNPHD.

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“Our goal is to reduce childhood obesity by providing education to children at a young age. We use stories, puppets and activities specific to each grade to help students learn about MyPlate, food groups, calories and staying active,” said Janousek, TOUCAN coordinator at SWNPHD.

This is the sixth year for the TOUCAN program and the first year it came to Wauneta-Palisade Schools.

“The TOUCAN program was a great thing to incorporate into PE,” explained Joseph Frecks, who teaches K-4 physical education classes at W-P. “It gave the kids a great change of pace in PE, and allowed them the opportunity to learn more about food groups, healthy and unhealthy foods, and the importance of exercise and an active healthy lifestyle.”

SWNPHD started the TOUCAN program with the McCook Elementary School and has now expanded the program to eight schools.

“Any time we can talk to our kids more about eating healthy and getting exercise it is a good thing. These are the things, through physical education, we want our kids to know about and understand—and hopefully carry it with them throughout their entire lives,” stated Frecks.

The health department brought the program to 1,079 K-3rd grade students in southwest Nebraska elementary schools during the winter and spring months.

Schools participating in the TOUCAN program this year included Chase County, Dundy County/Stratton, Hitchcock County, Medicine Valley, Perkins County, Southwest and Wauneta-Palisade. The event in Palisade last week was the last one of the year.

“We enjoyed working with Mr. Frecks and his students in our high energy program,” stated Janousek.

Each student who participated in the program received a bag to take home which contained a

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bookmark, pencil, sticker, TOUCAN pin and MyPlate information to share with their parents and guardians.

In addition to the TOUCAN program, SWNPHD also coordinates the Nebraska Kids Fitness Day in McCook each year where fourth grade students from throughout the area come to participate.

SWNPHD serves the counties of Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Perkins and Red Willow. For additional information about the program contact Janouseck at (308) 345-4223 or [respite@swhealth.ne.gov](mailto:respite@swhealth.ne.gov).



**Kiley Anderson, a kindergarten student, navigates the Caterpillar Crawl obstacle course.**