



Leader photo by LAURA SLOAN

Dubach High School eighth-graders listen as Lincoln Parish Superintendent of Schools Danny Bell discusses the benefits of healthy living. Bell visited the school last week to note the progress of the Dubach Health Outreach Project among teenagers.

Bell supports teen health focus

By Laura Sloan
Education Reporter

Lincoln Parish Superintendent of Schools Danny Bell became concerned when he visited Dubach High School last week.

As he sorted through health screening statistics for 85 student partici-

pants in the Dubach Health Outreach Project (DUHOP), Bell noted the high number of who were overweight and had high blood pressure or cholesterol levels.

"We're seeing larger stomachs, larger sizes (in children) and health concerns ever increasing in our schools," Bell said. "I've been shocked when I've gone to the elementary schools. Even when I was a

principal I did not see the number of juvenile diabetes as there is today."

Last week was Bell's first trip to observe the inner workings of the after-school classes for DUHOP, funded through a \$500,000 Rural Health Care Services Outreach grant through

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Bell surprised to see overweight students

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Louisiana Tech University's Department of Human Ecology.

He was surprised to discover that out of the high school students screened, 45 percent were classified as overweight, 19 percent had high cholesterol and 42 percent high blood pressure.

DUHOP project director Mary Murimi said these statistics indicate a disturbing trend.

"We've really got to do something and this (the health classes) is only the beginning" she said. "As they get older it will only get worse. They could be at risk for heart attack or diabetes as early as their 20s if they don't change their (eating and exercise) habits."

Bell said societal alterations have had an impact on healthy living.

"It's different for children today than it was for us baby boomers," Bell said. "The first thing we did when we got home from school was go outside. We didn't have computers and other machines that kept us inside. Also, we've developed into a society where both parents usually work, and it's pressure to come home and prepare meals, (so) fast food is more common."

The DUHOP student participants listened as Bell took a few minutes to speak about his own knowledge and experiences regarding the effects of diet and exercise on health.

Several of the students appeared to be implementing the knowledge they have accumulated in the after school health program into their daily lives.

Dubach High seventh graders Breanca Johnson and LaQuisha Armstrong are among these students.

"We're learning how to prevent osteoporosis by eating more calcium," Johnson said. "You get it in foods like milk, cheese and yogurt."

With a family history of asthma, high blood pressure and obesity, Armstrong is committed to learning from the project.

"I want to learn to eat healthy so I'll be healthy when I get older," she said.

Participant Nathan Morrow, 13, was surprised to learn exercise burned fat.

"I didn't know that before," he said. "I just thought exercise was fun."

Since enrolling in the classes a month ago, Morrow has cut down on sodas and foods containing large amounts of sugar.

"I drink more water and unsweet tea now," he said. "I've also cut down on fast food because the salt and grease can be more harmful than helpful."

Tech student Jacob Oakley, who has been leading the teens in exercise, found a goal for his coaching.

"It (the classes) should be fun, but they should also feel like they've accomplished something."