

NESHAMINY

Middle school blazes health trail

The Middletown students will have to come up with a plan for their school and enact it by June, officials said.

By RACHEL CANELLI COURIER TIMES

Rachel Canelli can be reached at 215-949-4191 or rcanelli@phillyBurbs.com.

When it comes to health, Neshaminy Middle School is trailblazing the way for other schools in the area.

The Middletown school is one of five in the nation chosen to participate in a pilot program called the "Trailblazing Project" with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation Healthy Schools Program, officials said.

During a two-hour training session Wednesday morning in the school's library with alliance representatives, 35 students learned that the project involves four steps: assessing their school environment through a student and staff survey; gathering resources through the alliance; creating an action plan and implementing it by June; and sharing their story.

"I'm really excited to help my school get active and be an important part of change," said 15-year-old Sarah McGowan. "I think this will help to motivate people for future problems."

The project provides a toolkit, or online guidelines, to the kids to help them become leaders in a health initiative for positive change, said Principal Karen Wychock.

Only two middle schools were picked, including Neshaminy. The rest are high schools. The other four schools are in Wisconsin and Florida, officials said.

Each school was selected based on its involvement in health, according to alliance representatives.

Neshaminy Middle School, a local pioneer for nutrition and fitness, has been active in several programs through Pennsylvania Advocates for Nutrition and Activity for the past few years, said Wychock.

The district's high school, Carl Sandburg Middle School and Samuel Everitt Elementary School, were also picked for the healthy schools pilot program last year, which increased exercise, put healthy foods and beverages in vending machines and cafeterias and boosted resources for teachers and staff, officials said.

"I like that it's an educational approach," said Elaine Wyatt, family and consumer science teacher.

"This will teach the students how to make change the correct way."

All the participating Neshaminy kids are sixth- through ninth-grade volunteer health ambassadors, Wychock said.

"I think this will show students that we're part of the community, too," said ninth-grader Mark Stanford, 14. "We have a say."