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Edgewood school gets \$1M

Money will help cover higher building costs

By Amy Julia Harris
Staff writer

Kanawha County is getting an additional \$1 million in state funds to finish building the new elementary school near Edgewood Country Club.

On Monday, the state School Building Authority voted to help Kanawha County close a \$2.8 million budget gap to complete its "school of the future" on Charleston's West Side.

"This will be a major boost for the West Side," said Ron Duerring, superintendent of Kanawha County schools. "This project has been a labor of love."

The School Building Authority initially gave Kanawha County \$8.84 million in 2010 to fund the project, with Kanawha County officials saying they would devote \$3.77 million in local funds.

But costs for the school project, which were initially pegged at \$12.5 million, have skyrocketed after push-back from area residents relocated the project to its current hilly site.

It has cost more than \$6.5 million alone to clear trees, move land and build an access road up to the site of the school before anything has been built.

The total project is now estimated at \$21 million. Kanawha County schools will contribute roughly \$11 million to build the new school, with

SEE SCHOOL, 13A



KATE LONG | Gazette

The banner on the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department building in Parkersburg tells the story.

RAIN CHECK



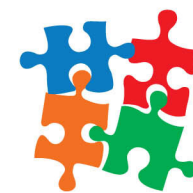
LAWRENCE PIERCE | Gazette

A woman walks through a downpour of rain on Washington Street East in Charleston Monday, which was under a flood watch. The National Weather Service is calling for rain for much of the state through tonight and up to 3 inches of rain over a two-day period. Flood watches and flash-flood watches are in effect for most of the state. The rain is expected to subside by Wednesday.

Health program called role model

By Kate Long
Staff writer

A top Centers for Disease Control official called West Virginia's "Change the Future WV" project on Monday "a model for rural America in the effort to end the obesity and chronic disease epidemics."



THE SHAPE WE'RE IN

"We point to this project as an example for rural areas," Rebecca Bunnell, acting director of CDC's Community Health Division, said at a meeting convened Monday to discuss ways the state can build on the project.

The \$4.5 million project started two years ago, funded by the Centers for Disease Control through the state Bureau of Public Health. "Our challenge was to create healthier communities by changing the environment," said Joe Barker, who oversaw it.

"West Virginia has very disturbing statistics for both children and adults," Bunnell said. "This project shows that you can mobilize people in communities to make a true difference."

"Instead of telling people to eat healthier and be fit, we tried to make it easier

SEE ROLE MODEL, 3A



Photos courtesy of the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department

This "mommy and me zumba" class is one way the community uses Wirt Primary School after hours.

ROLE MODEL

FROM PAGE 1A

by expanding the choices around them," said Tom Bias of West Virginia University's Health Research Center, which is evaluating the project.

One by one, speakers described the impact of the project, which the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department operated in six counties.

"When the Change the Future project asked if community people could use the schools after hours for fitness activities, I immediately said yes," said Daniel Metz, Wirt County superintendent of Schools.

Senior citizens now walk the school halls. Adults play ball in the gym after school. "Mommy and me zumba" meets in the Primary Center cafeteria. "Taxpayers pay for the buildings," Metz said. "They can use them for healthy activities when the kids aren't."

"When the Change the Future project asked if we would create healthy checkout aisles, we hesitated," Wal-Mart regional manager Beth Nagel said. "They convinced us it's a great idea."

Now there are candy-free aisles, with healthy snacks and toys in at least 10 West Virginia Wal-Marts and grocery stores, with plans for more.

"Convenience stores told us they couldn't carry fresh fruit and vegetables because it cost too much," said Carrie Brainard, project director. "We found a wholesaler who agreed to sell produce at an affordable rate."

Today 85 convenience stores in Wood, Calhoun, Roane, Ritchie, Pleasants, and Wirt counties carry fruit and vegetables.

"Our charge was to create models other communities could copy. So we tried to collaborate and do affordable things."

They convinced high school booster clubs to add healthy options to food sold at sporting events: fruit, chicken salad, apple slices with low-fat caramel dip.

They bought mountain bikes and gave them to the high schools.

They looked over the walking and biking trail maps for their six counties and figured



To encourage convenience stores to carry fresh produce, the project gave them display racks.

out ways to connect them.

They arranged for local farmers markets to take SNAP (formerly food stamps) cards. In some cases, they helped create farmers' markets.

These projects are like puzzle pieces that "add up to a healthier community, once they are put together," said CDC project officer Wendy Heirendt.

"Until today, I never put it together that all these things were part of the same project," Wirt Superintendent Metz said.

At the project's request, the Office of Child Nutrition helped up schools for the federal Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program. Now 8,700 children eat and learn about fruits and vegetables many had never seen:

kumquats, starfruit, kiwis.

"We did one thing that cost a lot of money," Whitberg said. "We wanted to see what would happen if children had physical activity every day." So they hired 14 extra high school physical education teachers for a year.

The impact was startling. Only 34 percent of students tested in the aerobic fitness zone at the year's beginning. By year's end, it was 43 percent.

All six county commissions passed resolutions calling on the state Legislature to mandate daily physical activity in the schools.

'Change the Future,' part two

Another CDC grant, the five-year Community Transformation Grant, picks up where this one leaves off, Barker said. "We're calling it Change the Future WV too," he said. "This time it will be statewide."

Four health departments — Mid-Ohio, Kanawha-Charleston, Cabell-Huntington, and Berkeley — have \$300,000 apiece per year to keep the ball rolling.

"This is the kind of thing that really could change the future," the CDC's Bunnell said.

Learn more about Change the Future WV projects at www.changethefuturewv.org.

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