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More Dist. 300 schools meet healthy challenge

By Larissa Chinwah

Following the lead of one school, all 16 elementary schools in Community Unit District 300 now have earned a gold medal for promoting healthy eating and exercise habits for students.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently announced that another three elementary schools received a gold award of distinction in the Healthier U.S. Schools Challenge. Another dozen schools earned the bronze award.



The district's successes also led to an invitation to attend a special reception with first lady Michelle Obama at the White House later this month.

"This is the culmination of two years of hard work and dedication by a large team of children's health advocates in the district," district spokeswoman Allison Strupeck said. "We are excited that our original goal became a reality."

Just as the district had hoped, Meadowdale, Parkview and Perry elementary schools joined Golfview Elementary in attaining the gold award of distinction.

Golfview was the first non-charter school in the state to earn the recognition. Rock star nutritionist Jill Jayne wrote a song and produced a music video about the school and district's achievements.

The district now has one-quarter of the awards handed out in the state.

Each gold distinction-level school will receive a \$2,000 award and a plaque, while bronze-level schools will receive a plaque and \$500.

To successfully complete the challenge, schools must serve and promote a healthy lunch menu, increase the amount of structured exercise and provide an approved nutrition curriculum, Strupeck said.

The Healthier U.S. Schools Challenge is endorsed by Michelle Obama's LET'S Move campaign. She will hold a reception at the White House to celebrate the successes of school districts from across the country, as well as to motivate education leaders to continue focusing on the issue of childhood obesity.

Strupeck said a contingent from District 300 will include representatives from each of the 16 schools, as well as district-level representatives.

Strupeck said anyone who is traveling to Washington is paying his or her own way.

The district also was nominated by the Midwest region of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food & Nutrition Service to provide one of the speakers for the White House reception.

"We are not going to hang our hat on this recognition," Strupeck said. "We are starting a generational goal of correcting this tremendous health problem for our community and nation."