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Local

BAY CITY

'Jump with Jill'

MacGregor Elementary students have fun learning about nutrition

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With beat-boxing, dance moves and singing, Jill and D.J. Devy Watt had a gymnasium brimming with kids excited about healthy eating. The energy might at first appear to be a sugar rush, until you realize they are singing about "nature's candy" — fruit — and super-power vegetables.

Students and teachers at MacGregor Elementary School, 1012 Freemont St. in Bay City's South End, got in the groove of nutrition with the Jump with Jill concert-esque assembly March 18.

The Jump with Jill "Drink Milk for Life" tour, sponsored by the United Dairy Industry of Michigan, is stopping at 35 schools statewide through June 4.

Each school sponsored for

the program also is part of the "Fuel Up to Play 60" initiative, which encourages children to get at least an hour of physical activity daily.

Before the program, the school received materials such as DVDs and music videos to help the students become familiar with the topics covered, said Hailey McDonell, who plays "Jill" throughout the Midwest.

A Garden City native, McDonell graduated in 2012 from Western Michigan University with a degree in secondary education. While interning at a life skills center, she saw the original Jill — Jill Jayne — perform the show.

"I was blown away," she said.

McDonell applied for a role that night, and later auditioned and was cast as the third "Jill" for the program.

McDonell said, because they already know some of the songs and dance moves, students feel as though they are getting to meet a celebrity



Hailey McDonell (Jill), above, leads students in a dance while, above right, kindergartner Ariel Capp and classmates dance during a "Jump with Jill" rock 'n' roll nutrition show March 18 at MacGregor Elementary School in Bay City. (Danielle McGrew/MLive.com)

when she and D.J. Devy Watt (played by Devon Watson) arrive.

Joe Ricard, the physical education instructor at MacGregor, said "I thought it was really good. It was perfect timing, after being cooped up all winter."

The program included songs about the importance of caring for your body with healthy foods, plenty of water and milk, and the program was dotted with humor and dance.

"The kids are going to

remember this better (than a lesson at a desk)," said Brianna Banka, a registered dietician with the United Dairy Industry of Michigan. "It's less of a lesson and more of a fun activity."

You can share Jump with Jill lessons with your kids, including music videos "In the Kitchen" and the "JillPlate," the company's take on the United States Department of Agriculture MyPlate initiative. Find the videos and more information at jumpwithjill.com.



Pre-kindergarten student Skylia Green-Sweeney, left, is extremely excited about the "Jump with Jill" program.