



Sparking a creative outlet
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Foley an early favorite to win fourth state title • 6A

The "Jump with Jill" live tour got the kids at Halfman Elementary up and moving March 20, teaching them about the importance of exercise and eating right.
Photo by Deb Jacques



'Jump with Jill' brings energy to Halfman, Hoover

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MADISON HEIGHTS — The kids at Halfman Elementary went wild as Hailey McDonell pumped a milk jug in the air — a milk jug clad in bling and aviator sunglasses.

Known by his rap name "Calcium" and rolling with his crew "Low-Fat Yogurt" and "Low-Fat Cheese," See JUMP on page 10A

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Hailey McDonell, the "Michigan Jill," crosses her arms with attitude at the center of her posse of student leaders. They were all wearing shades and bling like their hero, Low-Fat Milk, far right, also known by his rap name, "Calcium." Behind them, DJ Devon Watson danced onstage.

Photo by Deb Jacques

Jump

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it was the edgiest depiction of the dairy aisle ever.

And the kids ate it up.

Halfman Elementary, in the Madison district, and Hoover Elementary, in Hazel Park, are among the 35 Michigan schools chosen for the "Drink Milk for Life: Jump with Jill Live Tour," which bills itself as a "rock 'n' roll nutrition show."

It's an apt description. The March 20 show at Halfman Elementary was a whirlwind of music, sound effects, singing, rapping, beat-boxing, dancing and more.

McDonell, a native of metro Detroit, is the "Michigan Jill," spearheading the tour here in place of the show's founder, Jill Jayne, a registered dietician and musician based out of Pittsburgh.

The sheer amount of energy on display made an excellent case for the virtues of a healthy diet and exercise. McDonell leapt on and off the stage, did the splits, kicked over her head, bounced to a hip-hop beat, did an Irish jig, sang an ear-piercing falsetto and conducted the room in a rousing rock anthem.

The kids, in kindergarten through fifth-grade, were spellbound by McDonell and her DJ, Devon Watson. The two were buoyantly animated from start to finish, playing off each other with perfect timing.

The live tour is backed by the Fuel Up to Play 60 program — a combination of the "Fuel Up" initiative by The United Dairy Industry of Michigan, encouraging kids

to eat breakfast each morning, and the "Play 60" initiative by the NFL, encouraging at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. The tour runs March 17 to June 4.

The program emphasized how we each get only one body, and need to respect it with a healthy diet and exercise. In a trick question, McDonell asked the audience if junk food can "fuel" our "engines." The answer is yes, it can, but it's the sort of energy that peters out quickly compared to that of "nature's candy" — sweet fruit like watermelon, apples, bananas and kiwi — and "superpower vegetables," introduced with a heroic theme and named for their ability to give us healthy skin, hair, muscles and eyes.

On the topic of exercise, McDonell and Watson got the entire audience beat-boxing — one half of the room laying down a bass-line with the beat of a heart, and the other making the whooshing sound of lungs breathing in and out. Exercise is "the beat of the body," as McDonell put it, and it's a rhythm crucial to keeping the body in tip-top shape.

From there, the show talked about the importance of keeping an active body hydrated with water, "the clear choice," and about the benefits of milk, an abundant source of calcium for growing strong bones and bodies.

The end result is a high-gloss, high-energy performance, crafted to compete against negative messages from not-so-healthy food vendors.

"Nowadays, (the kids') learning style is very kinesthetic, so we realized we've got to get the kids with something that is catchy and upbeat

to catch their attention, because fast food companies are using all of these catchy advertisements, and that's what's sticking with them," McDonell said after the show at Halfman. "We're trying to use that same tool that junk food companies use, but add a positive spin with catchy songs about getting your calcium-rich foods, your superpower vegetables and nature's candy."

Joanne Vader, principal at Halfman Elementary, said the show is part of a larger focus on health at the school, funded by the Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative through Wayne State University's Kinesiology Department.

"We all went down there for professional development in August to get started on all of this," Vader said.

The students at Halfman Elementary have healthy snacks in the classroom, including breakfast each morning, as well as a special cart full of equipment to encourage play during recess. There are also health tips during the announcements each morning.

The school then applied for a separate grant through BHC for Jump with Jill — an otherwise expensive assembly — with a clear message and a memorable approach.

"We have to connect with the kids in the way that's easiest for them to learn," McDonell said.

To learn more about Jump with Jill, visit www.jumpwithjill.com.

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