

[back to article](#)



Madison Street field day showcases wellness education

By [Joe Callahan](#)
Staff writer

Published: Monday, March 30, 2009 at 6:30 a.m.

First-grader Brooke Balentine smiled after finishing the balloon-popping event at Thursday's 24th annual field day at Madison Street Academy.

The shy girl said making the big balloon break by just sitting on it was the most challenging part of her day. For others, it may have been the relays, hoop jumping or numerous other events.

Though Madison Street's longtime tradition continued Thursday, this year's event took on a new meaning, showcasing the Marion County School District's wellness education programs.

Marion County was one of only four districts in the country to receive a \$25,000 grant for its wellness efforts, including its fresh fruits and vegetable campaign this year.

The school districts were handpicked to provide wellness activities, which included classroom instruction and teaching the importance of eating right and exercising before, during and after school.

"The program promotes a more active school day," said April Liles, a dietitian and the School District's food service coordinator.

It all culminated Thursday at a "Game On: The Ultimate Wellness Challenge" field day at Madison Street, where children and relatives gathered for the fun in the sun.

With a digital camera in hand, Madison Street Principal Philip Leppert strolled along the sidelines at the event, talking about how important it is to give students a day away from the classroom.

Students have just completed a series of Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test exams. And Thursday was the last day of school before their spring break, which runs through this week.



ALAN YOUNGBLOOD/STAFF
PHOTOGRAPHER

Second-graders cheer on their team, the Webb Warriors, during the Game On: The Ultimate Wellness Challenge games Thursday at Madison Street Academy.

"It's good they can let their hair down after FCAT," Leppert said.

The grant, which was implemented last fall, was to create programs to focus on students making better food choices and becoming more active.

Florida Action For Healthy Kids Partnership coordinates in-state programs along with partners, including the Dairy Council of Florida.

"You can't get good FCAT scores or grades if a child is not healthy inside and out," said Jennifer Sills of the Florida Dairy Council.

Two other elementary schools, Sparr and Ocala Springs, also held "Game On" field days. After spring break, each child will get a bag with a water bottle, Frisbee and healthy goodies.

Numerous parents thought Thursday's field day was fun and a great experience for their children.

"It's great seeing them participating in other activities outside the classroom," said Ray Althiser, who was at the event to watch his first-grader, Cassidy, and his fifth-grader, Hunter.

Linda Beckwith, a Madison Street physical education coach who organized the field day, said it is important for the children to get more exercise, especially in an electronic world.
