Hitting the Pavement, for Health’s Sake

Teaching students to lead healthy lives is a breeze – when the lessons are fun.

Falls Church High School held its 10th annual Jaguar 5K and fun run April 25, and students from the entire region joined in. Many staffers were there as “buddy” walkers and runners.

Westlawn Elementary Principal Linda Ferguson, pictured far left, was among 45 runners from her school. They won the prize for the most participants from an FCHS feeder school. Westlawn third-grader Yisak Thomas took the first-place trophy for the one-mile fun run.

Luther Jackson Middle had 24 participants. Pine Spring Elementary Principal Armando Peri was one of 15 from his school. FCHS Principal Michael Yohe was the official starter – and a runner – along with about 350 of his staff and students. A busload of parents, teachers and students from Glen Forest Elementary’s Young Men in Motion Club came from the Stuart High School pyramid with 43 runners.

Sometimes, students themselves serve as fitness mentors. Marshall High School students led a month-long sports clinic in April for students at Lemon Road Elementary. Parklawn Elementary students wowed spectators at the school’s annual hoedown in March with both line- and square-dancing moves taught to them by their P.E. and music teachers.

At Pine Spring, parents and staff start them young. This year, they invited preschoolers from Head Start to join the upperclassmen in a free Bobcat Boot Camp. Three times a week, students pour into the gym and out onto the track before school. Former PTA President Josie McCormick, pictured at right, high-fives the Head Start kids as they complete a boot camp run.

Students are also learning the healthy life by growing their own vegetables at schools, such as Belvedere Elementary: “Classes have feasts with their harvests,” said Stacey Evers, Belvedere’s environmental educator. They also share the wealth — by giving away green bean seeds to Bailey’s Elementary and Sleepy Hollow Elementary.

Haycock Elementary first-graders also planted lettuce, radishes and snow peas this winter, thanks to a grant from the Northern Virginia Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.
On-the-Job Training for Future Work — and Independence

The catering crew for the Fairfax County School Board is all business in its stainless-steel-clad kitchen. The school board is meeting tonight and a taco salad bar is on the dinner menu. An organized frenzy is on to meet a 2 p.m. delivery deadline.

Sheridan Marsili grates the cheese at one end of the kitchen. Sean Minnick forms and fries up tortilla bowls at the other, right next to Amy Merrell, who is bathed in the steam rising from the taco meat fryer. Grace Taylor chops herbs for the bean and vegetable salsa.

They and the other crew members are all students in Davis Career Center’s Culinary Arts component. The 16- to 21-year-olds come to the center in Region 2, on the Marshall High School campus, to learn job and independent-living skills.

The students have conditions or disabilities — from autism or Down syndrome to deafness — that could affect their ability to hold a job. But they’re out to defy the odds with on-the-job training, serving real clients in and outside the school system.

“We cater to the school board, the Department of Rehabilitative Services and SourceAmerica: a non-profit job source agency for people with disabilities,” said Becky McDermott, the teacher who helps the center’s culinary students hone their skills. “We serve church groups. One woman ordered 220 dozen cookies from us for the holidays to provide gifts to all the churches she works with.”

On this day in April, the rest of the culinary arts crew is preparing desserts. Nada Abdelrahman grates carrots for the carrot-cake muffin batter that Matthew Greco spoons into muffin tins.

The School Board also ordered a cookie tray. So a mini-assembly line is in the works, with Yesly Morales Gonzalez scooping the dough and Omar Kassem and Celeste Fernandes rolling it onto the baking trays.

Adam Barber keeps all of the equipment sparkling clean. He is the dishwasher: a job he relishes above all others.

The center draws students from 15 high schools in western Fairfax County.

Some travel to the center for a couple of hours a day of vocational training. Others spend the entire day at the center for both job training and classes that teach them other skills — such as personal banking, how to write a résumé, how to navigate round-trip travel to a job.

The goal: to help them one day achieve an independent life.

Or, at the very least, a more independent life.

On the Job Training for Future Work — and Independence

Sheridan Marsili grates cheese for a taco salad bar for the April 9 meeting of one of Davis Center’s best customers: the School Board for Fairfax County Public Schools.

Minnick forms and fries up tortilla bowls at the other, right next to Amy Merrell, who is bathed in the steam rising from the taco meat fryer. Grace Taylor chops herbs for the bean and vegetable salsa.

Grace Taylor chops the cilantro for the bean and vegetable salsa.

Sean Minnick fries tortilla bowls and Amy Merrell prepares the steamy batch of taco meat for the School Board’s taco salad bar. Matthew Greco, in back, works on dessert: carrot-cake muffins.
Fairfax County Public Schools has four site-based programs for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Region 2’s Camelot Elementary is home to the DHH program for preschoolers. There are 29 preschool students in Camelot’s program. Just as in the DHH sites for older children – at Canterbury Woods Elementary, Frost Middle and Woodson High schools – Camelot’s students have access to three different types of classrooms:

- One offers the auditory/oral method for teaching students. In this classroom, the focus is on teaching children to communicate verbally by learning speech reading – commonly known as lip reading – and by using sound-amplification devices, such as hearing aids or cochlear implants.
- Another offers cued speech, which uses eight hand shapes in four different placements near the face to visually interpret the 40 different sounds of the English language.
- Two of Camelot’s DHH classrooms use the total communication method, which includes the use of American Sign Language (ASL), finger spelling, speech reading and amplification technology.

The DHH sites serve students who require a more intensive level of service. But many FCPS students who are deaf or hard of hearing are also educated in classrooms at their neighborhood schools – with support from the itinerant teachers of the deaf/hard of hearing who travel from school to school.

Parents of deaf or hard of hearing students can take free classes in American Sign Language at DHH sites, such as this daytime class held April 14 at Camelot Elementary School. FCPS also offers free cued-speech classes for parents.

Kilmer Center, a day school for 5- to 21-year-old students with severe disabilities and often fragile medical conditions, unveiled in March its new Multisensory Interactive Learning Environment (MILE) Lab.

The lab is the product of three years of fundraisers held by the center’s PTA, working with staff and the community.

Now teachers can use the MILE lab to bring lessons to life for the students, who require significant instructional adaptations.

For example, for a science lesson on the seasons, the lab can introduce students virtually to spring through multiple senses: with the scent of flowers, the sight of budding flowers, the sound of raindrops, and the feel of the rushing wind.

Kilmer Center is located adjacent to Kilmer Middle School in Region 2.
Stuart High School next year will launch an ESOL Academy to provide intensive English-language support to some of the hundreds of unaccompanied immigrant students reunited with family members in Fairfax County.

At a meeting with Stuart parents April 22, FCPS Superintendent Dr. Karen Garza said FCPS high schools have seen a marked increase of students with a beginner’s level of English, known as Level 1 in English for Speakers of Other Languages parlance. Many are believed to be part of a surge of 68,541 unaccompanied minors apprehended at the Southwest border during the last fiscal year.

“One of the Level 1s are not speaking any English, and have not been recently engaged in any high school,” said Garza, adding that FCPS officials visited schools in Texas, California and the International Academy at T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria in an effort to address the unique needs of the new arrivals.

“We’ve been looking around the country at successful models for schools within a school.”

Garza said ESOL Academies will open at Stuart and Lee High schools in the next school year, “and we’re considering adding Herndon.” The Fairfax County School Board will discuss the plan in a May 11 workshop at Gatehouse Center.

As of March, Stuart had the largest number of ESOL Level 1 students of any FCPS High School: 212. Herndon High School had 205, followed by the Region 2 schools of Falls Church High (158) and Annandale High (117). Lee High School had 112.

Dr. Fabio Zuluaga, Region 2’s Assistant Superintendent, said the academies will serve the most recent arrivals — “75 to 100 kids with less than a year in the country and no English.”

He said the goal is to accelerate the newcomers’ English-language education and then transition them into general education classes as soon as they learn English:

“Newcomers to the country need additional support.”

Woodburn Elementary School for the Fine and Communicative Arts partnered with the Fairfax Symphony for its April 11 concert, “A Civil War Portrait,” by integrating 6th-grade American History lessons of the Civil War into classwork related to music, art, poetry, historical fiction and even P.E. Their works were exhibited at the concert, which many staff and students attended. On April 7, Principal Pops Conductor Luke Frazier visited sixth-graders at the school, pictured at right, to talk about music in the Civil War. In April, the Kennedy Center’s Changing Education through the Arts (CETA) program named Woodburn and Bailey’s Elementary School for the Arts and Sciences as two of only seven D.C.-area schools that will be CETA partners for the next three years.

A panel of judges selected Westbriar Elementary fifth-graders Anna Kwartin and Lina Hussein to attend a weeklong Space Camp this summer. The students created models of their designs to maintain and extend the life of the Hubble Space Telescope. They made their presentation before the judges on April 23.

At the request of the FCPS Advanced Academics office, Shrevewood Elementary hosted a team of D.C.-based teachers and administrators April 27 to demonstrate for them the school’s use of advanced math programs: Project M2 (Mentoring Young Mathematicians) and Project M3 (Mentoring Mathematical Minds).

The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation awarded a $99,744 grant to Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology to help boost the ranks of lower-income, high-achieving students at the elite magnet school. TJ will use the grant to invite into a mentoring program 7th-graders with significantly high scores on standardized tests who also qualify for free or reduced meals. The first 100 scholarship recipients will attend the school’s week-long Tech Institute this summer and receive test prep for its admissions test.