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LAKE PARK P.E. PROGRAM AMONG STATE'S BEST

Lake Park High School Physical Education Department is one of only ten schools in the state to receive the Blue Ribbon Program Award by the Illinois Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. This is the third straight Blue Ribbon recognition for Lake Park P.E., making it a model program in the state for lifelong wellness education.

Lake Park is also the only school in Illinois to have received three blue ribbons.

"This award is very exciting, not only because you have met the criteria, but because historically you will be recognized in an elite group of schools and educators in the state of Illinois. This means you will help set the tone for the future of physical education in the state," said Holly B. Gansz, Blue Ribbon Chair at IAHPERD, wrote in the award letter.

"We've always had a wellness approach to physical education," said P.E. teacher Deb Vogel, who together with teacher Cathy Patzner applied for the award.

Gym class is more than playing basketball or lifting weights. During freshman and sophomore years, students have a set program of health and wellness lessons in their physical education classes. Juniors and seniors get to pick their physical education activities to begin pursuing lifelong recreational interests.

The underclassmen learn the six phases of a workout: warmup, stretching, muscular strength, sustained activity, cool down and final stretching.

"We teach them why your body needs to warm up before stretching, what they're stretching and why," Vogel said. All students learn to use heart monitors for aerobic workouts and how to maintain a healthy body through the right nutrition.

"By the time they complete the program, they should have the expertise, skills and knowledge to be their own personal trainers," Vogel said. "We teach them that you don't need an expensive health club to maintain good health."

This approach to physical education – lifelong health and wellness – is important for all students, even athletes who get plenty of physical activity during their sports' practice. Lake Park does not exempt anyone for gym class.

Junior Nathan Bracher is a wrestler and a gymnast. He hopes one day to be a Navy Seal. He concedes that p.e. is an easy "A" for him, but also feels he's learned a few things.

"I think it has helped a lot of people become their own trainers," Nathan said. "I know what muscles are used in a workout and how nutrition adds to what you are trying to do –like staying hydrated and eating carbs before you go running so you have stored energy."

Gym class doesn't measure how many free-throws you can make in basketball, for example. Instead, lessons are designed to teach technique and mechanics of exercise. Sophomore Liz Maciejewski said the program has helped her build on things she learned in junior high.

"I learned how to exercise properly and at what intensity," she said.

The school will receive Blue Ribbon banners from IAHPERD at the state convention in November, which will be displayed at each campus.