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Bill Clinton to honor 3 Boston schools for healthiness

Posted by Matt Rocheleau June 13, 2011 04:16 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Three Boston schools will be among 275 nationwide honored Monday night by former President Bill Clinton for increasing healthy eating and physical activity.

The [Alliance for a Healthier Generation](#), founded six years ago by the American Heart Association and the William J. Clinton Foundation, will recognize the John F. Kennedy Elementary School in Jamaica Plain, the Clarence R. Edwards Middle School in Charlestown and the East Zone Early Learning Center in Dorchester.

Leaders from each of the schools will accept the honor at the William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum in Little Rock, Ark. during the "2011 Healthy Schools Program Forum." The forum includes an address from the former commander-in-chief and will be [webcast live here](#) at 7 p.m.

"Even though these schools do not have abundant resources, their teachers and staff are dedicated to the health of their students," Clinton said in a statement. "Every school in America should emulate these educators by making healthy eating and daily exercise a priority. It takes this kind of collaboration between schools, their students, and national partners to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic in the United States."

To earn the honor, each of the schools revamped its meals service and physical activity programs to meet or exceed standards set by the alliance's Healthy Schools Program, officials said. The initiative, aimed at reversing the national trend in childhood obesity, provides expertise and free resources to more than 12,000 schools nationwide.

The three Boston schools – the only honorees in Massachusetts – will receive bronze honors, according to an announcement. Silver, gold and platinum awards will also be given to schools from 29 other states based on their achievement level.

"We commend the dedication of our healthy schools for their efforts to offer students and staff nutritious meals and a variety of physical activity opportunities," Ginny Ehrlich, CEO of the alliance, said in the release. "Their success proves that despite academic pressures and budget constraints, schools can develop environments that foster healthy lifestyles to benefit young people now and into the future."

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Boston schools teamed up with the Healthy Schools Program in 2007, alliance officials said. With support from the Kessler Family Fund and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, all 134 city schools are now involved in the initiative.

Last week, the city's school district announced the creation of Healthy Connections, "a strategic plan to advance student health and wellness in all Boston public schools," officials said. Earlier this school year the BPS Health and Wellness Department was launched and "is working to rapidly increase physical fitness, nutrition and health education in every school," the city school department said.

"We are working aggressively to close access and achievement gaps for our students, but for us to be successful in that endeavor we must have healthy, engaged students," said Superintendent Carol R. Johnson. "We know that if our students are eating right and staying active they will be more engaged in the classroom. We take pride in the staff at these schools who are going the extra mile for our students."

Boston school cafeterias and kitchens made headlines earlier this year when [expired food was discovered](#), leading to the reassignment of the city school district's longtime food and nutrition director.

The Alliance for a Healthier Generation also announced Monday it received a \$23.2 million grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to expand and extend its healthy schools initiative through 2014. Since the program's inception in 2006, RWJF has awarded the alliance more than \$51 million.

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