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Marquez Celebrates 'Fresh Kids Week'

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Designed to teach kids how to read food labels and recognize real, whole foods from processed ones while providing parents with information about how to help their kids make healthy food choices at home and at school, 'Fresh Kids Week' launched at **Marquez Elementary** on Monday, Jan. 26.

The week-long event focused on different themes like "Happy is Healthy" and "Better Health Through Better Living" and kicked off with a morning assembly featuring guest speakers like Palisadian **Dani Shear**, author of *The Foodie Club*, health columnist **Amanda Enayati** and more.

Fitness icon and Honorary Mayor **Jake Steinfeld** made an appeal to the students, encouraging them to make healthy food choices and stay active, while visits from **Gelson's**, Bolthouse Farms and Whole Foods included fresh produce donations and cooking demonstrations with students.

"Our kids are at an age where they are starting to form lifelong habits. Now is the time to encourage kids to make independent decisions while we steer them in the right direction to make the smartest choices they can," said **Joyce Wong Kup**, one of the parents spearheading the initiative.

Parents, students and communi-

ty members joined the movement at Wednesday night's screening of the film *Fed Up*. The revealing documentary, produced by Palisadian **Laurie David** and Katie Couric, addresses the prevalence of sugar in foods and its role in childhood obesity.

The film investigates how the American food industry may be responsible for more sickness than previously realized.

Following the screening, Palisadian **Dr. Cori Cross**, a pediatrician, mother of three and anti-obesity educator, engaged the audience in an informative Q&A discussion.

"It will take a very strong group of politicians to make a real change in what our kids are eating and I'm not sure they exist in the mass we need them to, but parents do," Cross said. "Parents can be strong lobbyists when they organize and they need to ban together to make change."

Cross urged parents in the audience to send their children to school with lunches from home that contained protein, fruits and vegetables, encouraged drinking water instead of juice or other sugary beverages and gave one rule to live by; never buy packaged food that is neon and has Dora the Explorer or SpongeBob on the outside.

"That's probably not real food," she said.

Echoing the message from the film,

Cross said that the average American consumes 100 pounds of sugar over a year, which contributes to the onset of obesity, diabetes and other medical conditions.

Guests at the screening were invited to take the Fed Up Challenge and pledge to go sugar-free for 10 days.

Suggestions for lowering sugar intake at Marquez included eliminating "bake" sales and replacing sugary birthday treats at school with fun and healthy snacks like building edible fruit arrangements.

Throughout the year, parents will continue to receive support and information about how to bring about lasting change in school and at home.

"This is just the start, changing our perception about food and health. We have to follow up with the kids and the parents to change the culture," Wong Kup said.

Many of the parents involved in Fresh Kids Weeks admit there are challenges to developing these healthy habits – namely finding the time.

"Time is definitely the challenge, but it starts with us – the grownups. It's hard, but we have to change our own living habits to make this a life change for our entire family," Wong Kup said. "If we can incorporate all that we've learned this week, that's a great start, and with a lot of follow up we can make real change."