

Healthy Air Living Schools program reduce exposure of students to air pollution

By María G. Ortiz-Briones

Vida en el Valle, Tuesday, November 3, 2015

The goal of the Healthy Air Living Schools program is to reduce exposure of students to poor air quality in the Valley.

And the bigger the number of schools in the Valley that participate in the HAL program, the bigger number of students who are less expose to air pollution in the Valley, said Valley Air District officials.

“Healthy Air Living Schools is a health-focused multi-faceted free program that helps schools provides an important service to their students and families,” said Jaime Holt, the District’s chief communications officer. “It allows them to be proactive in addressing Valley air pollution and student health.”

According to Holt, there are 1,600 schools in the District’s area which covers the counties of Kern, Kings, Tulare, Fresno, Madera, Merced, Stanislaus and San Joaquin.

And of those, approximately 1,000 schools in the eight-county region are enrolled in the HAL schools program, Holt said, adding that the District hopes to have 100 percent of schools in the Valley signed up for the program.

The HAL Schools program was developed by the Air District to notify schools when air quality is not conducive to outdoor activity, and to educate their staff, students and parents about maintaining and improving the health of the Valley’s students.

And students at Mulcahy Middle School in Tulare learned during a news conference for the Healthy Air Living Schools program on Tuesday, Oct. 27 at their school site last week how important is for schools to be part of the HAL program as well as for students and parents to do their part in reducing poor air quality.

Mulcahy AVID student representative Nikki See told fellow classmate how the “San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District is responsible for keeping all schools in Tulare City School District aware of our air quality on a daily basis.”

During the media event, See talked about how her school gets air quality updates throughout the day, how the school district has adopted anti-idling and how the district encourage parents to turn off their engines when dropping off or picking up students with anti-idling signs posted at each school site.

“You may or may not think so, but air pollution takes its toll on children and schools, both in attendance and in scholastic achievement,” See said.

Dr. Clare Gist, Tulare City School District Superintendent said all 15 schools sites in her district participate in the HAL program.

Gist said the district has 10,300 students from preschool through eight grades.

According to Tricia Grissom, Tulare City School District Health Services, approximately 1,000 to 2,000 students in the district have inhalers on school campuses.

The Healthy Air Living (HAL) Schools program, which is available to all Valley schools, provides supports to schools in making informed decisions about outdoor activities in relation to air quality.

Holt said the program has three components which include the Real-Time Air Advisory Network (RAAN), which offers 24-hour access to real-time localized air quality information throughout the Valley via a website, email and text messages; the anti-idling educational materials, which remind parents and drivers of students to cut their engines when dropping off and picking up students, reducing student exposure to harmful emissions; and the Real-Time Outdoor Advisory Risk (ROAR) guidelines that provide recommendations for outdoor exercise depending on air quality levels.

Holt said materials, training and support are provided to each school at no cost by the Central California Asthma Collaborative, the Air District’s partner which administers the program throughout the San Joaquin Valley.