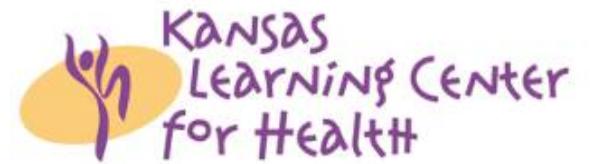




KANSAS LEARNING CENTER FOR HEALTH

505 Main St., Halstead • 316-835-2662 • www.LearningCenter.org
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Learning Center Reaching More Students, Adding Programs

INDEPENDENT BUSINESS PROFILE

More students are learning about healthy, well-balanced lifestyles at the Kansas Learning Center for Health, as in the past year it has been teaching more programs, adding new exhibits and developing new curriculum.

Executive Director Carrie Herman noted many exciting things are underway at the Learning Center.

“We’re always looking for new ideas and new things to offer the community, so if people have ideas—and we tell the schools this as well—if you see a need out there, let us know because we want to explore that and see what we can do to incorporate it,” Herman said.

The Learning Center has grown in its number of annual visitors. Herman estimated they would finish this fiscal year with somewhere between 14,000 and 15,000 students benefiting from their programs, a boost up from 13,396 the year before.

Along with that, the Learning Center’s five instructors are on track to teach 300 programs in the current school year, up from 250 a year ago.

This increase came from the Learning Center offering a discount on programs in the fall, hoping to alleviate their busy spring season, but it didn’t quite work out that way.

“We had more take advantage of that in the fall, but then our spring has still been just as busy,” Herman said.

Thanks to grant funding, the Learning Center was even able to bring in some new school districts last spring and fall, and it’s continuing to seek more grant opportunities to do this.

“We did have some schools that had attended last spring that wanted to come back, because they had been so impressed with the Center,” she said. “They were new schools that hadn’t been here before or it had been so many years, and they saw what we had to offer and wanted to come back.”

The Learning Center has been expanding its curriculum with new programs thanks to grant funding. Herman noted that a grant from the Hesston Community Foundation had allowed them to develop a new “Healthy Relationships” program for middle- and high-school students that covers both platonic and romantic relationships.

So far this program has been given to all high-schoolers in Hesston and Halstead, and students in Burrton and Peabody also plan to attend this spring.

Curriculum like this is something the Learning Center is looking to continue to expand. Teenage social-emotional health is a new area for them, as most of their other programs relate to physical health, nutrition, body systems and puberty for younger students.

“We know that the needs of children change, and we know that the needs the community sees change, so we want to be right there offering the curriculum and programming that’s needed

to address those issues,” Herman said.

School districts Herman’s talked to about this say they are excited and looking forward to these new programs, she said.

Another program that’s increased in popularity this year is drug prevention.

“We have more schools in Harvey County and McPherson County that are taking advantage of the drug prevention classes, both at fifth-grade level and at seventh-grade level,” Herman said. “So I think that’s going to become a growing class as well, along with the social-emotional because of the concern in the communities.”

Last summer the Learning Center received a grant from the Central Kansas Kids FUNd that allowed them to install a new Kids FUNd Corner exhibit geared toward children ages 3-6.

“It’s been a nice addition to have for the younger students and the preschoolers that come in,” Herman said.

This summer they expect to install a new interactive exhibit on the digestive system, and in early 2019, the Learning Center plans to open yet another exhibit called “Farm to Family” to teach students about the path food takes to get to their table.

“It’s going to be a pretty large exhibit,” Herman said.

The Learning Center is planning a number of upcoming events to look forward to.

In June it will be hosting its annual BIG Fit summer program for children. The BIG Fit is a weeklong program that encourages phys-

ical, mental and social fitness, with this year’s theme being “Out of This World.” Families will be able to choose between two sessions, June 4-8 or June 11-14, to accommodate more people’s busy summer schedules.

In the fall the Learning Center will be hosting its annual fundraiser, the Harvest Gala, with a new casino night theme. Attendees will receive “play money” and try to win raffle tickets by playing at blackjack, roulette and other games.

“This provides attendees a fun opportunity to learn new games they haven’t played before,” Herman said.

The Harvest Gala will be Oct. 27 at Son Wray Ranch.

Herman noted that other annual events at the Learning Center like the O-Slim-Pics and the monthly health connections activities have also been successful and are doing well. Museum memberships to the Learning Center, which were introduced a year ago, have also seen steady growth.

With all these things keeping the staff at the Learning Center busy, it’s clear that it is continuing in its mission of being a premier resource for students and adults across south-central Kansas, as it has been for the past 53 years.

The Learning Center is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday or on weekends by appointment.

