



## Growing Upward Henderson County Schools—Upward Elementary



The motto of Henderson County Public Schools (HCPS) is “Where Tomorrow Begins...”. That initiative and forward thinking is evident in the steps they have taken to support the health and wellness of staff and students. A prime location to see the fruits of their labor is Upward Elementary, appropriately built on the grounds of an old orchard.

Rebecca Poplin, Upward Principal, has been a champion for wellness, making changes in her own life and serving as a role model for teachers and students. “Teaching is such a hard job, said Poplin. “We need to be physically fit to do it.”

The principal encourages staff to participate in aerobics, pilates and yoga classes sponsored by the district School Health Advisory Council. Nutrition modules such as “Portion Distortion” and “Rethink your Drink” have been integrated into the fitness sessions. Staff also participate in organized hikes and have formed teams to compete in the BeActive NC Challenge. Teachers set an example by

walking with students each morning before school.

Funding from the N.C. Health and Wellness Trust Fund allowed the local Partnership for Health to provide training and resources to teachers on incorporating nutrition education and physical activity into the classroom. Also, a climbing wall has been installed in the school gym.

During “Absolutely Incredible Kid Day”, students of all abilities participate in a variety of activities. All students cheer each other on as “Upward Stars”. For the “Upward Read-a-thon”, top readers were treated with a visit from a strong man competition winner. He talked with the students about favorite books and led them in fun exercises, inspiring them with new goals.

Noting the history of the property, Upward worked with the Henderson County Education Foundation Bullington Center to plant winter vegetable gardens. Herbs are cultivated in window boxes and

AIG students grow plants in a class greenhouse. The N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences trained teachers in Using the Outdoors to Teach Experiential Science, UTOTES. Health units are embedded into the science curricula. Teachers utilize the interactive stations along the Upward Nature Trail: butterfly garden, bird viewing, weather and writing stations, math measurement, senses garden and decomposition area.

The cafeteria is another learning laboratory. Henderson County Schools have implemented the N.C. Nutrition Standards increasing low fat choices, whole grains, fruits and vegetables. During National Nutrition Month, Detective “I.M. Healthy” caught students eating fruits and vegetables rewarding them with non-food incentives.

It is clear from their innovation and enthusiasm that Upward Elementary and HCPS are committed to provide all students with the opportunity to learn and succeed in a healthy environment, honoring the individual and nurturing the potential of all children.



Upward Elementary Herb Boxes and Winter Vegetable Gardens



Upward Elementary Nature Trail and Senses Garden

### Contact Information:

Rebecca Poplin  
Principal, Upward Elementary  
Henderson County Schools  
Phone: 828.697.4764  
rpoplin@upw.henderson.k12.nc.us

