

HEALTH

Vo-tech students take up fitness challenge



Students at Perth Amboy Vo-Tech High School practice for the Joetta Clark Diggs Fitness Challenge. PHOTO COURTESY OF SHEILA IRRAZIRY

By Jennifer Engelhart
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The challenge is on to discover the fittest students in the Middlesex County Vocational and Technical School District in the upcoming Joetta Clark Diggs Fitness Challenge.

Students will compete in push-ups, sit-ups, standing broad jumps, rope-jumping and a mental challenge that began in January with an overall competition March 14.

The challenge is sponsored by Horizon NJ Health, the Joetta Clark Diggs Sports Foundation and EmPoWER Somerset.

Director of Health and Wellness with EmPoWER Somerset Kristen Schiro said the competition is part of its coordinated

school health grant.

"We have four schools together that worked on this grant with us," Schiro said. Participants include Piscataway, Perth Amboy, East Brunswick and the Academy at Woodbridge, which all are part of the county vo-tech school system.

"Each school will conduct the competition in their own school and in the beginning of April, we will hold an awards ceremony at the East Brunswick Vo-Tech," Schiro said.

Diggs, a four-time Olympian, is instrumental in this challenge. Schiro said that EmPoWER wrote Diggs into the grant as somebody who would be involved in the health and wellness of the grant.

By building confidence and

encouraging a "can-do" attitude among the youth, the fitness challenge is making a major difference in their lives, said Karen L. Clark, vice president of Medicaid HBCBSNJ/president of Horizon NJ Health. Horizon NJ Health is on board with the challenge.

"Each year, we look forward to partnering with the Joetta Clark Diggs Fitness Challenge," Clark said.

"Joetta Clark Diggs, the founder, has developed a program that motivates young people and ultimately contributes to a lifelong pattern of healthy behaviors," she said.

"Joetta is a role model for children and adults alike with a

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commitment to healthy communities and the well-being of individuals that is heartfelt, positive and contagious," she said.

Diggs provided the students with four trainers, including Crystal Boyd, Olivia Roman, Reggie Lampley and Janine Davis.

According to Schiro, the trainers come in to work with the students on all activities that will be implemented in the challenge. She said the final goal is to help these students see health and fitness as something fun and important to strive for.

Diggs said that by partnering with Horizon NJ Health, she is in a position to send a message that there are healthy alternatives to achieving a fit body, starting with the youth and extending to the families and commu-



Students at Perth Amboy Vo-Tech preparing for the timed sit-up event at Joetta Clark Diggs Fitness Challenge.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SHEILA IRRAZIRY

nities.

"With the help of Horizon NJ Health, the Joetta Clark Diggs Sports Foundation takes great pride in bringing this fitness challenge, which is a free program, to students across New Jersey," Diggs said.

Staff Writer Jennifer

ONLINE

For more information on the Joetta Clark Diggs Sports Foundation, visit <http://www.joettasportsandbeyond.com>

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