

**Clay County Communities Revitalization Association  
Press Release for Immediate Distribution  
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**Happy Trails Program Gets Students Walking**

After attending the 2018 Safe Routes to School Conference, Hayesville teacher Jeanine Craig and teacher assistant Kristy Ingram decided to initiate a Happy Trails experience for Hayesville Elementary School students. The Walking Wednesday program was initiated three years ago as an attempt to get more students walking safely to school. In our rural community, it is difficult to include many students as 100 % of the students either ride in a bus or car to and from school each day.

Craig and Ingram heard complaints from students who were not included on Walking Wednesdays and decided to do something about it. They scheduled the experiences during the students' exploratory time during the day, so all students could be included. They also were motivated to teach the students about some of the trails that are easily accessible for parents and children in Clay County.

The kick-off for Happy Trails was scheduled for April 6 during the Clay County Communities Revitalization Association's Take the Quanassee Path to Good Health event. The kick-off walk was rained out, so the program didn't start until the students returned from spring break. The students have enjoyed walking around the school campus, to the outdoor classroom, Spike Buck Mound, Chatuge Dam and the Jackrabbit Biking/Hiking Trail.

Ingram noted how much the students enjoyed the experiences. "We are hopeful the students will ask their parents to take them to these and other trails during the summer. It was amazing how many of our students had never been to these off-campus locations. I'd say about 30% of the students fall in this category. The kids were thrilled to be walking on the trails with their friends. Besides, it is free entertainment!"

Region 1 Active Routes to School Coordinator Jackie Moore expresses her appreciation of the efforts of Hayesville School staff members for their commitment to their students' health. "Hayesville Elementary School was the first school in Region 1 (the 8 western counties) to implement and continue a sustainable walk Wednesday program beginning in September 2015. Other schools in the state have looked at their program as a 'model' in North Carolina. The program's success was due to support from the Administration and the dedication of the teachers and staff, as well as parents who saw the health benefits of their children meeting up with their peers and walking to school."

No doubt, Hayesville Elementary School will receive additional recognition for their Happy Trails program, involving the entire student body, which started this spring.



Kindergarten teacher Denise Lunsford and her students enjoyed walking on the Jackrabbit Biking/Hiking Trail as part of the Happy Trails program.