

CRAWFORD COUNTY AVALANCHE

School Dentist checks choppers

by Dan Sanderson-Staff Writer

In between classes, recess and lunch last Wednesday, students at the Grayling Elementary School took time to have their choppers checked.

About 30 students at the elementary school went through the full gamut of a dental exam with The School Dentist, having their teeth examined and cleaned. They also received a fluoride treatment, and some students had sealants placed on their adult teeth to prevent cavities.



Aaron Hagle, 9, a fourth grader at Grayling Elementary School, has sealants applied to his molars by dental hygentist Jessica Victor as Dr. Melanie Sheils-Vergeldt, The School Dentist, looks on. (Photo by Dan Sanderson)

The School Dentist, Dr. Melanie Sheils-Vergeldt, also pays annual visits to the AuSable Primary and Grayling Middle School.

The dental services are billed to insurance companies or parents are charged a nominal fee for the preventative care. The students receive a written report from the check ups to take home to their parents.

"We try to identify what the needs are so the parents know what to keep an eye on," Sheils-Vergeldt said.

The School Dentist has visited more than 100 schools in Michigan, setting up in vestibules, lunch rooms and on stages.

"We're pretty portable - we just need water and we're ready to go," Sheils-Vergeldt said.

Students at the elementary school received their check up in the comfortable confines of the school's conference room. In between x-rays and check ups, the students were able to

watch a cartoon produced by the American Dental Association called "Dudley the Dinosaur," which educates children about dental hygiene.

After the exams and treatments, each student was given a Sponge Bob tooth brush and bubblegum flavored tooth paste.

Michael Phillips, 9, a Grayling Elementary fourth grader, came through his check up with no cavities.

"It just feels great to have my teeth cleaned," Phillips said.

Sam Cousins, 10, a fifth grader, said he likes seeing the familiar face of The School Dentist while in the dental chair.

"You can talk with the other kids from class, you don't have to wait a long time and you see the same dentist that you saw last year," Cousins said.

Shania and Maggie Gasser, 9, twin sisters who are fourth graders, received check ups last week. Maggie said she appreciated not having to interrupt their parents work day to make a trip to the dentist.

"You get to stay at school and you just walk down from class," she said.

Eddie Evarson, 10, a fifth grader, is a big fan of going to the dentist no matter where he has to go.

"It's pretty much the same - it's fun for me," Evarson said.

Angela Camp, the Grayling Elementary School principal, said bringing The School Dentist in helps take the fear out of the regular check ups. Afterwards, Camp said the students show off their clean teeth to school staff.

"I think the students are proud that they receive the services from the dentist," Camp said. "Bringing the dentist to school is a lot less intimidating - so that's another perk - because they receive services in familiar surroundings."

Barb Mick, the AuSable Primary School, said having The School Dentist in adds to the energy of the school day.

"There is a buzz in the building when they're here, and even the kids that don't go all want to go get checked out, she said.

Sheils-Vergeldt said she sees more cavities today, which she attributes to the foods kids and families eat.

"Everything we eat is loaded with sugar," she said.

Sheils-Vergeldt, from Beverly Hills, was a family dentist in Birmingham, Rochester and Almont, and also has experience as a Health Department Dentist in Oakland, Tuscola, Huron and Sanilac Counties. She hatched the idea to become The School Dentist three years ago after she was diagnosed and went through treatment for breast cancer.

Referrals are made to local dentist for restorative dentistry, orthodontics, oral surgery and hospital dentistry.

"Our intent is to see the kids who don't get seen," she said. "I don't want to start a major project and not be able to do the follow up treatment."

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