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## More needed in push for better health

The window is open right now to take a couple of minutes to fill out an easy online application—all in the name of good health.

That's the message of some local and state officials continuing a campaign to get businesses, schools and even whole communities officially certified as healthy.

For local businesses that means a healthier place for it's employees and customers.

The same can be said for school districts and cities with the added bonus of possible grant money thrown in for good measure.

It's called the Certified Healthy Oklahoma program. It's been in place for some time but the push to encourage more applications continues on for the Garvin County Health Department and Allies for Better Living group.

Jessi Bridgeman of the state health department says the numbers show more is needed.

"Garvin County ranks 74th in health out of the 774 counties in the state," Bridgeman said during a Pauls Valley Chamber of Commerce board meeting.

"We have a long way to go. There's a lot we need to improve.

"This is a way for businesses and schools to provide a healthy environment for their employees and students.

"We want to make sure we have a healthy employment population. We want to make sure our population here is ready for the workplace."

The application period already open continues through Nov. 1 on the certifiedhealthyok.com website.

"Businesses are probably the easiest," she said about the online application process. "Schools and cities are a little more time intensive because there's money involved."

Here in Garvin County there's only been one school certified as healthy. That school is Whitebead.

According to Bridgeman, others need to follow as the process not only provides healthier choices but can provide grants to schools.

"That's throwing away money," she said about schools not certified. "There's money tied to that."

She says school districts have used this grant funding to do things like add gym equipment, update running tracks and create walking trails.

It's what Bridgeman describes as anything to promote physical wellness for the schools.

Things businesses can do to get certified are go tobacco free, offer insurance to their employees, promote things like blood drives and in some cases offer healthy snacks.

“Think about what you’d like to improve, she said.

“What businesses get from this is improving the workforce. If that’s not enough, if Pauls Valley were to go apply it would not be certified healthy.

“Pauls Valley needs a minimum of three businesses to apply for (it) to be certified healthy.

“There are grants out there for communities.”

Julie Selman, a health educator in Garvin County, is one of those on the front lines of getting more information out and encouraging more people to get involved.

“The Certified Healthy Oklahoma programs provide opportunities for Garvin County’s businesses, campuses, communities, congregations, early childhood programs, restaurants and schools to create environments that support policies that ultimately improve Oklahoma’s health outcomes,” Selman said.

“We encourage potential applicants to consider what they are doing to make the healthy choice the easy choice for their employees, customers, students and citizens and to submit an application.”