

# County youth speak out about their concerns

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The Jackson County Community Health Action Team hosted the Jackson County Youth Speak Out last week at Southwest Technology Center.

The event is one of several Youth conferences, luncheons, round tables and speak outs held all across the state. The format gives county high school students the opportunity to address concerns in their communities, schools, state and nation in a respectful manner to an audience of community leaders and legislators who participated in a listening capacity.

The students prepared a 3 to 5 minute speech, which not only stated their concern but offered possible solutions. Following a buffet luncheon, the Duke drama team preformed a skit related to risky behaviors students engage in. At the end of the day, students and community leaders worked together discussing options to accomplish the proposed solutions set forth by the students.

The 2006 Youth Speak Out was a great success. There were 19 student presenters and many community leaders representing Altus Air Force Base, local churches, law enforcement, state and local government, fire department, council members, legislators, civic groups, educational institutions and other social service agencies.

The students received positive feedback and many questions related to their innovative and thoughtful presentations. Every school in Jackson County was invited to participate in the Speak Out. Student's Blair, Duke, Eldorado and Olustee participated in the event.

The students from Blair were Kayla Halcomb, Savannah Jones, Brady Almaguer, Bret Almaguar, Michael Pray, Sarah Johnson, Cyrus Burks, Alanna Johnson, Jonathan Altom, Owen Risinger and Kristin Ellis.

The students from Duke were Amanda Hennessey and Kelly Richards.

The students from Eldorado were Whitney Trammell and Kelsey Christian.

The Olustee students were Jesse Sanchez, Kattie Hamilton, Michelle Reyes and Sami Schenkel

Topics that were presented included teen alcohol and drug use, minors using tobacco, sex offenders in our communities, tobacco use in schools, peer pressure, bullying, stereotyping, community youth recreation centers, religion in schools, underage drinking, child abuse and neglect, community service, suicide, not enough activities in small towns and incentives for good grades. Although only 19 students presented at the Speak Out, there were 37 essays submitted from the four schools.

This event allowed students to talk to civic groups, adults and other and tell them what they think would actually work in these situations. In many ways it was confirmation that yes, the problem "we" thought existed truly is a reality however; according to these teens "we" are not addressing it in the most effective manner.

If you are interested in learning more about the Jackson County Community Health Action Team or would like more information on the Youth Speak Out, please contact Brandie O'Connor at (580) 482-7308.