

## Ginnings students learn importance of water safety

*Weeklong program teaches drowning prevention and swimming*



Ginnings fifth-grader JoAnn Ullrich smiles as she waits for a safety activity to take place at the Denton Natatorium as part of the school's Jaguars Swimming for Success program.

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**By Anthony Tosie, [atosie@dentonisd.org](mailto:atosie@dentonisd.org)**

With summer nearing, families often seek respite from the heat at pools and lakes. To help prepare its students, Ginnings Elementary hosted Jaguars Swimming for Success, a weeklong program teaching water safety.

From May 19-23, fifth-graders attended the Denton Natatorium to receive vital information about how to swim, prevent drowning and rescue other swimmers. The event was the brainchild of Kristen Gray, Ginnings curriculum specialist, who saw other school districts operate similar programs.

“A lot of our students live near facilities that lack life guards, which made it extremely important that they understand proper water safety,” Gray said. “This definitely wasn’t an event where we told the kids, ‘Hey, we’re going to play in the pool.’ With this program, they can help save themselves or someone else in a swimming emergency.”

Gray added that the event was integrated into the curriculum, with students solving math problems about the volume of a pool, learning the science of why objects float, and writing journal entries about what they learned. Some of those lessons were reinforced at the event, as students learned that an empty ice chest can be used as a makeshift buoy to throw to someone in need of help.

Creating the event wasn’t just a school issue, however – it “simply wouldn’t be possible without the community’s help,” Gray said.

Local businesses and donors provided funds to help pay for the courses and bus usage, while the city of Denton's parks department met with Gray for several hours to help organize and coordinate the event. Newton Rayzor Elementary teacher Lewis Hill, who runs a daylong swimming program for his school, also gave suggestions and guidance.



The program for the event was created by Monica Martin, the Denton Natatorium's aquatics center manager, who modified her typical Red Cross swimming program to fit students' needs.

"We wanted to build something specific to Denton," Martin said. "With drowning being one of the leading reasons children die in the U.S., we wanted to give them an experience they can use to build their swimming safety skills. Denton is surrounded by open water with Lake Ray Roberts to the north and Lewisville Lake to the south, so it's important that we reach area kids early in their lives."

Ginnings students agreed that the information provided at Jaguars Swimming for Success supplied them with valuable skills for the future.

"The safety parts were really helpful, because now I know how to help people from drowning," said fifth-grader Candice Needum. "I also really liked that they taught us how to do breathing in freestyle swimming. A lot of this information people probably don't learn until they're in high school or college – it's a privilege for us to have this opportunity at our age."

Jaguars Swimming for Success continues May 27-30 with a program for Ginnings fourth-graders.

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