Grow Healthy is a school-wide wellness program, developed and presented by the Department of Family & Community Health Sciences (FCHS). Thanks to a U.S. Department of Agriculture Team Nutrition grant awarded to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, FCHS has introduced this program in nine New Jersey counties: Warren, Union, Hunterdon, Somerset, Mercer, Burlington, Atlantic, Gloucester, and Cape May. School teachers, staff and administration; children; families; and volunteers all work together to make school a healthier place. Grow Healthy uses the school garden as a teaching and learning tool where students can connect their food to the natural environment while learning about health, nutrition, science, mathematics, and social studies, and be physically active at the same time. There are nutrition lessons in the classroom, school and family fitness events, foodservice trainings and school wellness council support, all of which build healthier kids and families, too.

In Mercer County, Ethel McKnight Elementary School in East Windsor received a mini-grant of $7500 to implement Grow Healthy.

Pictured: Carley Fisher-Maltese, Grow Healthy Regional Coordinator and Michelle Brill, FCHS Educator, Rutgers Cooperative Extension present the ceremonial check to Stephanie Flynn, 4th Grade Teacher and grant proposal writer, Ethel McKnight School; Sylvia Zircher; Principal, Ethel McKnight School; and Dr. Edward Forsthoffer, District Superintendent.
Since receiving the funding, McKnight students have worked in their school garden, enjoyed a family fitness night, and participated in their first lesson called “Pick a Food, Any Food”.

Parents have shared their opinions and concerns about school and family wellness at a focus group and have volunteered to become trained as Wellness Champions. In that role they will teach lessons, serve on the school’s Wellness Council and provide input into wellness policies and programs. The Grow Healthy program will run through June, 2012 with many more exciting educational events to come! For more information visit http://njaes.rutgers.edu/growhealthy/

Grow Healthy New Jersey Youth Pedometer Program

In addition to the USDA Team Nutrition Grant, Michelle Brill, Family & Community Health Sciences Educator of Mercer County, and Joanne Kinsey, Family & Community Health Sciences Educator of Atlantic and Ocean Counties, received a grant from the Aetna Foundation to purchase pedometers for students in the Grow Healthy Program. Fourth, fifth and sixth graders will wear pedometers to record the number of steps taken during the normal school day for five weeks beginning in January. Teachers will also add movement bursts throughout the day in order to increase physical activity which is known to improve focus and academic performance. This funding will also allow three additional schools in the state to participate in the pedometer component of Grow Healthy. In Mercer County, Trenton Catholic Academy in Hamilton was chosen for the program.