



Bruinicks weighs in on Garfield obesity program

By [JODIE TWEED](#)
Staff Writer

University of Minnesota President Bob Bruinicks spent the day in Brainerd Friday.

Bruinicks met with community and business leaders and visited Garfield Elementary School and the U of M regional office.

Bruinicks spent the morning at Garfield School, where third-graders are learning to develop healthy habits, thanks to a \$50,000 childhood obesity grant through the University of Minnesota. Funding through the program was provided to St. Joseph's Medical Center by the University of Minnesota Health Center through an allocation from the discretionary portion of the State of Minnesota's Medical Education and Research Cost.

The program was started by Dr. Mark Gray of Brainerd Medical Center, along with third-year medical students from the U of M. The third-graders have been learning about exercise and making healthy food choices. Part of the grant was used to purchase stability balls, which replaced their student chairs last week. The balls help strengthen students' core muscles and help with attentiveness and even handwriting skills.

Garfield teachers and staff, as well as Dr. Gray and other members of the community on the childhood obesity committee, met with Bruinicks to talk about the program. Bruinicks then made a classroom visit and tried out a stability ball.

"What is happening here is very exciting," said Bruinicks. "People from different fields are coming together to improve the health, nutrition and learning of young children."

Bruinicks then attended a luncheon with Dutch and Irma Cragun of Cragun's Resort before heading to a roundtable discussion with area leaders in the community, including those in business and education. Bruinicks said the Brainerd community has nearly 700 U of M graduates - 27 of them business owners - living here with more than 2,000 alumni - 74 of them business owners - living in Crow Wing County. He said he makes regular trips throughout the state to find ways to connect with business leaders and talk about local concerns. He said with the economic downturn, it's important to develop partnerships between communities and entities like the university.

"I know we're in a pickle and we're in this together," said Bruinicks. "The economy is not performing well. It's a global issue, not just Brainerd, and it's

hitting us all. When you get into tough economic times, you can't just keep an eye on the next quarter. When we come out of this we have to have a strong educational system and in research or fewer people will come to this region. We have to work together to keep the core infrastructure and what's going to sustain us in the long haul."

Bruinicks expressed interest in a proposed partnership between the U and the Brainerd School District that would allow the district to provide statewide teacher training in mostly kindergarten through second-grade literacy. Brainerd Superintendent Steve Razidlo told Bruinicks of his discussions with U officials, how Brainerd could be poised to become a lab school for new teachers.

Central Lakes College President Larry Lundblad discussed partnerships between the U and the CLC agriculture center at the Staples campus.

Lisa Paxton, chief executive officer for the Brainerd Lakes Chamber, asked what the university could provide in a broader business sense. There is a partnership between the U and the tourism industry, she noted.

Bruinicks discussed the Academic and Corporate Relations Center that has been started to help businesses of all sizes gain access to university resources that they need, including helping businesses develop new technologies and conduct research.

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