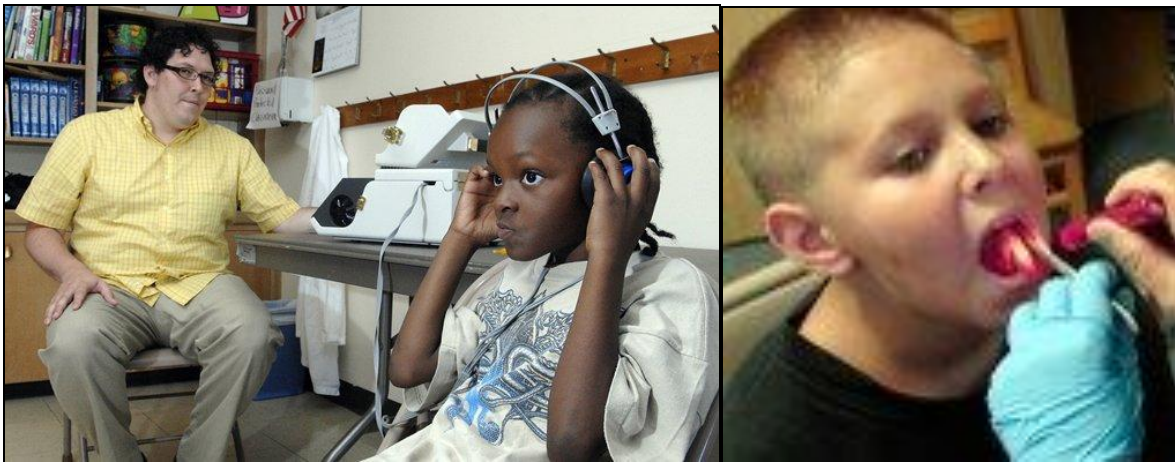


<http://www.columbiatribune.com/news/2011/aug/14/back-to-school-fair-helps-kids-get-ready/>

Back to school fair helps kids get ready

By Catherine Martin

Sunday, August 14, 2011



Hundreds of children filled the parking lot of Calvary Baptist Church yesterday afternoon and roamed from booth to booth, some stopping to take a peek inside a fire truck, while others checked out the bounce house or headed inside to get their faces painted.

But the event wasn't just fun and games — inside the church at 606 Ridgeway Ave. Kids could get vision and hearing screenings, dental checkups, and mental health exams. All of the checkups were free at the fifth annual Back to School Health Fair. The event also provided children with free school supplies, backpacks, and even haircuts to get them ready for the start of the school year.

The event was sponsored by nearly 20 companies and community groups, including the Voluntary Action Center, Boone Hospital Center, the Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services, Parents as Teachers and the Family Health Center.

“It just helps our kids be ready for school,” said Pam Victor, director of government relations and regulatory affairs for Coventry Health Care Inc.’s HealthCare USA, which helped with the event. “If they’re ready to go to school and they can hear and see ... they’re more likely to be successful in school and as adults.”

Cindy Mustard, executive director of the Voluntary Action Center, which collected school supplies for the fair, said making the event enjoyable for kids is essential to its success. “It lets the kids know that school is fun.”

The goal of event, Mustard said, was to provide at least 1,000 backpacks full of school supplies yesterday. In its most successful year, the event served about 2,000 kids.

The event is vital for many people, said Peggy Thoenen, manager of community development with HeathCare USA. She said last year a health care specialist detected an eye disorder in a child, and this year the child’s mother brought her other children to get checked.

Janett Collins said she has brought her three kids, Michelle, 12, Joseph, 10, and Paige, 5, to the event for several years after they first read about it in the newspaper.

“I think it’s a really neat idea and it’s a way to get more information about your kids,” Collins said. “And I think it’s a good thing for people who can’t afford to go to the dentist or the eye doctor.”

The fair also included information sessions about health issues such as allergies, asthma and childhood obesity — one of the nation’s largest health problems.

“Preventing obesity in childhood is key to preventing obesity in adults,” said Bert Bachrach, director of pediatric endocrinology and diabetes at the University of Missouri’s Children Hospital. “The key thing is to try to make some simple healthy choices.”

Families who weren’t able to attend yesterday’s event can pick up donated school supplies at the Voluntary Action Center, 403A Vandiver Drive, starting at 9 a.m. tomorrow.

