

Hopkinton students challenged to run piecemeal Marathon

By Michael Morton/Daily News staff

GHS

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HOPKINTON —

When runners take off from the town's starting line next month for the Boston Marathon, they face a grueling 26-mile course that must be conquered in part of a day.

So when Hopkinton Athletic Association members asked the second- and third-graders at Elmwood Elementary School yesterday to cover the same distance, they gave them 10 weeks.

After all, the fitness initiative is intended to teach couch-bound students that running is not a scary word.

"If you say, 'OK, you have to run a mile,' they have a stomachache, they have a note from home," said athletic association member Margaret Kennedy, a personal trainer and the mother of a 13-year-old boy. But, she added, "It's very doable. You don't have to be a runner to start."

Waving signs labeled with mile markers and upbeat slogans, seven runners from the association burst into a school assembly yesterday afternoon and jogged around students seated on the gymnasium's floor.

Their pitch? That over the course of 10 weeks each child can rack up 26 miles with two half-mile gym sessions during the week and with runs at home.

"The best is when you get there, you'll all be marathoners, too, one mile at a time," athletic association member Laura McKenzie told the students. "We want you to have a lot of fun with this."

In the hallway earlier, McKenzie said she had tested the program on her daughter. While she had to "cow poke" the 9-year-old at first, McKenzie said, halfway through the training her daughter started pushing for longer runs.

"I want the kids to think this is something they really could do," she said of the Marathon distance, noting the race's connection to town. "We're so keyed into the Marathon. It's part of their growing up, it's part of their childhood."

Indeed, a mural of the course adorns a wall in the gymnasium, and each year Elmwood asks Kenyan runners to visit.

When Principal Ilene Silver asked "How many people think they can run an entire marathon?" during the assembly, nearly every hand shot up. The program will begin April 7, at which point students will write their mileage in a log and get their parents to sign off on the tally. All participants get a water bottle, while those who go halfway get a T-shirt and those who finish get a medal. The class with the most miles wins a beach-themed party.

Asked if he could go the distance, second-grader Jacob Silliman said, "It's a long way." But, he added, he has some running experience. "I'm confident I can do it."

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