February kicked off our Healthy Mind and Body unit. The objective of the unit was to build a foundation for lifelong healthy habits. The children were excited to have the opportunity to examine the human body inside and out. We studied many areas, such as the five senses, the brain, the skeletal system, the circulatory system, the digestive system, the respiratory system, and nutrition. The children undertook a variety of projects to reinforce their learning of these concepts. The kindergarten friends couldn't believe what amazing and active bodies they have and were eager to keep learning and exploring each day.
THE FIVE SENSES

There are five senses that we use to explore and interact with the world around us: sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. We see with our eyes, smell with our nose, listen with our ears, taste with our tongues, and touch with our skin. Our brain receives signals from each of these organs, and interprets them to give us a sense of what is happening around us. The kindergarten friends were challenged to go without their sense of sight to eat a bowl of cereal, bead a bracelet, and draw a self portrait. They explored how their sense of smell and taste work together, using the taste buds on their tongues to experience tastes that are sweet, salty, sour, bitter and Umami (salty). Friends used their sense of hearing to play different types of instruments, listen carefully at sound bingo, explore how foods can make different sounds when you eat and how to silence a jingle bell. Finally, the friends explored their sense of touch using shaving cream, finger paint, and mystery sensory buckets, to feel and guess what was inside.

THE BRAIN-THE COMMAND CENTER

After learning about our five senses, it was important to explore the brain, the command center of the body. We discovered that our brain controls just about everything we do, even when we’re asleep. The children were introduced to the cerebrum, the cerebellum, the brain stem, and the functions of the right and left side of the brain. We explored activities using the left side of our brains (logic puzzles, scientific thinking and language), along with the right side (creativity, imagination and emotions).
THE CIRCULATORY SYSTEM

The heart is a muscle that pumps blood through the body. The children discovered where their heart is located and had the chance to use a real stethoscope to hear their own heartbeats before and after exercise, which we decided sounded like –lub-dub, lub-dub. We used a diagram depicting red oxygenated blood flowing out to parts of the body and the darker “blue” blood flowing back to the heart/lung system to be re-oxygenated before being pumped back out. The friends also discovered that their heart is about the size of their fist and in just one day, it pumps 1,900 gallons of blood through the body; about 1.3 gallons per minute. Friends used a 1/4 measuring cup and attempted to move 1.3 gallons of water in a minute. Though fun, we discovered it was almost impossible to move so much “blood” in just one minute.

THE RESPIRATORY SYSTEM

When learning about our respiratory system, we easily were able to demonstrate the action of our lungs by simply placing one hand on our chest and feeling as it moved up and down, as we inhaled and exhaled air. We learned new vocabulary words such as lungs, oxygen, rib cage, windpipe, and diaphragm. We made our own “artificial lung” using a straw and plastic lunch bag, to simulate how our lungs can inflate and deflate. We also learned how oxygen enters into the red blood cells in our lungs, which allows the blood to then carry oxygen to the heart. The heart then pumps all of the oxygen carrying blood to every cell in the body.

THE SKELETAL SYSTEM

The children were excited to learn that their skeletal system contains 206 individual bones and that this system of bones protects the internal organs such as the heart, stomach, and lungs. Even more interesting, the friends couldn't believe that babies are born with about 300 bones, which eventually fuse together by the time you become an adult. The friends learned how we use our muscles, which are attached to the individual bones of the skeletal system, to move the parts of our bodies. We explored a variety of activities to help us better understand and visualize the skeletal system, including building our own skeleton x-ray using Q-tips; making life-sized drawings of our bodies, and exploring bones and bone marrow of a chicken.
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**The Digestive System**

Exploring the digestive system was the “best part of the body” according to most friends. After watching a scientist swallow a medical camera to explore the digestive system, the friends couldn’t wait to learn more about the “gross” path our food takes each day. Using our own digestive system model, we observed the path of the food through the system. Food (crackers and bread) were placed into the mouth, torn by our teeth (our hands) and then proceeded down the esophagus, into the stomach where it mixed with the “stomach acid” (vinegar) which breaks down the food. From the stomach, the food passed into the small and large intestines before being eliminated as waste.

**Nutrition**

My Plate, the newer alternative to the food pyramid, teaches children about the different food groups and the recommended amounts they need to eat of each group in order to build healthy bodies. The children sampled a variety of foods from each of the My Plate categories, fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, and dairy. They learned the importance of eating fruits and vegetables, using the colors of the rainbow as a guide, created their own smoothies to support healthy eyes, bones, immune system, skin, heart and digestive system, sorted foods by food group and created a list of “non-healthy” foods that we should always eat in moderation. Friends were eager to apply what they had learned when it came to their lunches. Each friend graphed which food groups were in their lunches and brainstormed ideas for what they could eat for dinner, to supplement any missing groups.
SPECIAL GUESTS

Thank you to all of the parents that visited the classroom, sharing their interests and professions with the kindergartners. Wilder’s Mom and Dad shared their knowledge of the heart, brain and lungs. Ruthie’s Mom taught the friends American Sign Language. Cecilia’s Mom and Dad shared the importance of healthy living, mindfulness and meditation. Yoga Monsters taught us some new stretches. And Claes’ parents taught us all about our bones and how to eat calcium-rich foods to keep our bones strong.

FAMILY FESTIVAL

We enjoyed sharing our learning and continuing our exploration of our healthy minds and bodies with our friends and families. Friends loved playing their favorite brain games, tasting nutritious snacks from all the food groups, exercising their minds and bodies, experimenting with hand washing, practicing yoga, making calming pinwheels and creating with clay.