

Kenyan event at Hopkinton school canceled

By Michael Morton/Daily News staff

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HOPKINTON — A traditional school visit by Kenyan runners was scratched yesterday after the chicken pox struck a group of students slated as event replacements for those initially infected.

Originally, the visit was supposed to be held at the Elmwood Elementary School, where second- and third-graders have been learning about Kenya and greeting the marathoners for the last 15 years.

But when several vaccinated Elmwood students developed a mild case of the chicken pox, the event was moved to the high school field house and fourth- and fifth-graders from the Hopkins School were earmarked to serve as replacement greeters.

The move was made to provide a larger event space, one which would allow more space between students and the Kenyans, who come from a country where chicken pox is not as prevalent.

However, when several cases of the disease were subsequently reported at the Hopkins School, Marathon sponsor John Hancock Insurance and Financial Services canceled the event yesterday at the advice of its medical advisers and the state Department of Public Health.

"The best decision at the end of the day was not to conduct it this year and to have it next year," said Fred Treseler, the manager of the Adopt-a-Marathoner program for Elmwood and John Hancock. "It's a big responsibility."

The change comes after plans were made for Hopkins students to ask questions for their Elmwood peers and for high school photo students to take pictures of Marathon-themed student work at Elmwood for display at the field house. And while an infection connection could not be confirmed, Elmwood Principal Ilene Silver noted before the latest outbreaks that some of her students had siblings at the Hopkins School, providing a possible disease transmission route.

Although this year's visit has been canceled, Treseler said he plans to bring the event back next year, temporarily keeping it at the field house to provide enough room for the current third-graders to participate. After that, it will probably be moved back to Elmwood, he said.

While Hopkinton students will likely be disappointed, School Committee Chairwoman Rebecca Robak said John Hancock made the right call.

"I think it's a serious enough concern to warrant canceling it," she said.

Still, Robak said she hopes Elmwood students receive their traditional Kenyan flags so they can wave them at the town's Marathon starting line Monday.

"There's still the love of the Kenyan runners," she said.

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