

Dental care – lessons for every grade level



Kim Pevenage shows Rosie Klym and Kash Hendrick how to properly brush. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Rotting teeth fill the screen. Some are black from nicotine; some are decaying from drug use. Gums that have never been brushed reveal teeth that have seen better days and likely can't be saved.

It was like a science project gone bad unfolding before the students' eyes. Only this was real life. The images were all things Kim Pevenage sees on the job as a dental hygienist.

Two minutes twice a day and flossing at night. That's the difference between healthy teeth and unhealthy teeth, she told Heather Hart's fifth-grade class at Sierra House Elementary

School. And that flossing – it should occur before the brushing in order to loosen any particles between the teeth.

“If you saw what I saw all day, you’d floss every day,” Pevenage told the students. She pointed out that healthy gums don’t bleed.



Students at Sierra House choose a toothbrush package. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Kash Hendrick and Alex Budd were eager to demonstrate they are good brushers. A tablet that turns teeth purple where there is plaque would prove otherwise. Smiling, it was like the boys had eaten a carton of purple popsicles. Brushing removed the colored evidence.

“After seeing the purple, I’m going to brush better,” Alex said.

Pevenage explains the importance of X-rays, how it gives dental professionals a better idea of what is going on in a

person's mouth.

"I need to be able to see in between the teeth, and to see the bone that holds your teeth," she said. "Nicotine causes you to loose bone. Toxins in the nicotine eat away at the bone."



Heather Hart's class shows appreciation for Kim Pevenage, back center, for teaching them about dental care. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Each grade level receives a little different talk from Pevenage. The younger kids are shielded from the disturbing photos. High school kids can get an actual cleaning. All are given a pouch that has a tooth brush and small tube of paste.

Pevenage has been giving dental presentations in local schools since 2006 when her oldest daughter was in preschool at St. Theresa's. From there it grew into doing talks for both daughters' and each class of the respective grade level. In 2010, Pevenage started going into classrooms in Lake Tahoe Unified schools, with it growing from there.

Now she visits schools every other year, with the thought that

this will better reinforce her message and the kids won't get burned out on the talk.

Pevenage does this all on her own time. Her full time job is working as a hygienist for dentist Nicole Gordon in South Lake Tahoe.

Grants from Lake Tahoe Educational Foundation and Barton Health have allowed her to purchase some of the props she uses to help demonstrate her message, as well the giveaways for the kids, and tools for Pevenage to use in the dental lab at South Tahoe High School.

Pevenage has been working with dentist April Westfall since 2016 to bring care to South Tahoe High School students at the dental lab on campus. It means students not having to miss school, getting care that they might not otherwise have gotten, with any further work being done at Westfall's office.