



—Photo by LUCY DUKES

Paula Sandelin cuddles a rabbit during 4-H's After School Academy at Valley View.

After school with 4-H

After School Academy opportunity for fun, education, safety

By LUCY DUKES
Managing Editor

Danika Lange eats like a bug and Paula Sandelin cuddles a rabbit. Other students make projects out of beads, clay, paper and fabric. Some learn knitting while others

learn circus stunts.

All of this is part of 4-H's After School Academy, which runs Jan. 31-march 24 this year. This year, 183 children are enrolled from first through sixth grades.

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—Photo by LUCY DUKE

Danika Lange eats like a bug at the After School program at Valley View.

Academy

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The organization has been involved for two years in the program, which has been going for 11 years.

Through 4-H's involvement, the curriculum, activities, materials, tools and number of teachers were expanded, said Erika Thiel, 4-H program coordinator.

Classes meet from 3-4:30 p.m. at Valley View Elementary School, and are for students at all schools in Boundary County.

The activity-based education is designed to "enhance and support" education.

"After school time is one of the higher risk times," said Angel Merritt, a Vista Volunteer who works with the program.

"It's a nice, constructive way to keep them involved and engaged... For the kids, they love it. They are constantly looking for things to do," she said.

Merritt's own two children are enrolled in the Academy, she said.

"They're just learning while they're having fun," she said.

"The kids are very hands on, very interactive," said University of Idaho Extension Educator Sarah Howe.

Parents say they want the Academy in more locations and they want it to last longer, she said.

In addition to helping children when classes are held, the Afterschool Academy also gives children the opportunity to see 4-H isn't just about farm animals, said Thiel.

The activities include everything from scrapbooking to bowling and Spanish to painting.

"You don't have to own a cow to be involved in the 4-H program," she said.

The program may expand next year if a grant through the National 4-H Council comes

through. Boundary County is one of five sites in Idaho applying together for more funding.

Student fees make the program self sustaining now.

The Afterschool Academy was started in 1994 by Craig Sands, then the principle at Valley View.

He wanted to help keep children supervised after school and provide more learning opportunities.

4-H is involved in after school programs at more than 260,000 sites throughout the nation, emphasizing hands-on education to help children become more successful.