

The Washington Post

Shaping Up PE: The rise in childhood obesity prompts a gym class makeover

By Daniele Seiss

Sunday, August 8, 2010; W22

Teacher Donald Hawkins shouts enthusiastically to his 3- and 4-year-old students: "Can you name any animals that hop?"

The answers trickle in from the sleepy but smiling youngsters: a kangaroo, a frog, a rabbit. They decide to mimic the frog. It's 9:30ish in the morning inside Browne Education Campus's comfortably warm gymnasium in Northeast Washington. Fast-tempoed music gets the kids in the mood to hop, and off they go, rhythmically squatting and bouncing across the room. When the music stops, the children rise, a little more awake.

"Are you ready?" Hawkins yells. "I can't hear you!"

"Ready!" they reply.

This is Hawkins's health and physical education class, but it's not the PE that these preschoolers' parents probably remember. The days of students fretting over being the last one picked during volleyball or the first one tagged in dodge ball are fading in many D.C. area schools as physical education classes, such as this one, focus more on individual fitness, personal growth and development.

"The trend is to move away from

competitiveness," Hawkins says.

When his preschoolers' class is over, Hawkins shifts his attention to his next class, eighth-graders. Beginning with a tutorial on aerobics, Hawkins asks what muscles each activity works, and he and the kids go through a list. When the students overlook the central one, he drops a hint: "It's been beating since before you were born."

The students bound into step aerobics and then begin a game of "softball," a batless version with no teams and a small, yellow rubber ball. Since September 2009, Hawkins's curriculum has included a program that the D.C. public school system recently adopted called SPARK -- Sports, Play, and Active Recreation for Kids -- designed to combat child obesity by promoting healthy lifestyle changes and habits.

Advertisement

The advertisement features the Dish Network logo in the top left corner. The main text reads: "Add NFL RedZone to your DISH Network Package for \$7.00 /MONTH". Below this, the "NFL REDZONE" logo is prominently displayed. At the bottom, the phone number "1-888-206-3033" is shown in large red letters. A small disclaimer at the very bottom states "ONLY AVAILABLE WITH QUALIFYING PROGRAMMING PACKAGES."

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/30/AR2010073004747_pf.html

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

The Washington Post

Shaping Up PE: The rise in childhood obesity prompts a gym class makeover

(Senate passes \$4.5 billion legislation for healthy school lunches)

Through SPARK, all of the District's schools will receive a new physical education curriculum with age-appropriate fitness lessons and activities, on-site teacher training and equipment: jump ropes, Frisbees, hula hoops and balls, as well as parachutes, rhythm sticks and juggling scarves. The program also comes with follow-up support and assessment tools.

School officials said their goal is to help reduce the increasing number of children who are overweight, which is in line with the Healthy Schools Act, passed this year by the D.C. City Council and signed into law by Mayor Adrian M. Fenty. The act requires schools to provide students a prescribed number of hours of physical education and to serve meals that are higher in nutrition and include more locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables.

(Michelle Obama op-ed: A food bill we need)

Childhood obesity has been the subject of much public attention this year since first lady Michelle Obama in February launched her "Let's Move" initiative to help today's kids become adults who maintain a healthy weight. Nearly 20 percent of the nation's children ages 6 to 11 and 18 percent of those 12 to 19 are considered obese -- more than triple what it was 30 years ago, according to a study published in 2008 in the Journal of

the American Medical Association. With 20 percent of children 10 to 17 reported as obese, the District of Columbia joins eight states with the highest rates of obesity in this age group, according to the 2007 National Survey of Children's Health.

To help finance the changes to its physical education program, the D.C. public school system is using a \$1.5 million federal grant that will be awarded over three years through the Carol M. White Physical Education Program. The funds have enabled D.C. school administrators to add two new programs, including SPARK, and expand another one.

The grant requires students to fill out a Web-based survey that will assess their individual health and fitness progress four times a year. Federal stipulations also required school officials to submit a plan for sustaining the physical education program once the grant expires June 30, 2012 -- an assurance that should help improve health for students well

Advertisement

Help people in need.

Donate your car, boat or RV

Free Towing • Tax Deductible

FREE
3 day vacation
to over 80
destinations





Call Toll-Free

1-877-225-9384

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/30/AR2010073004747_pf.html

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

The Washington Post

Shaping Up PE: The rise in childhood obesity prompts a gym class makeover

into the future, said Heather Holaday, the health and physical education program manager for the District's Office of Youth Engagement.

Loudoun County was the only other area school system on the list of federal grant recipients. Loudoun officials said the school system is providing teacher training and purchasing equipment and structured fitness programs that align the physical education curriculum with health standards.

Sheila Jones, supervisor for health, physical education and driver's education for Loudoun public schools, said the grant already has made a huge impact on the county's physical education program by standardizing and raising the overall quality of physical education classes. The grant also has helped to boost morale among staff members, she said, noting that some longtime teachers have reported this year as their best ever because of the added equipment and the focus on students' personal fitness and health.

Hawkins, the D.C. teacher, who has 12 years' experience, said the grant will provide the equipment and training to help equalize physical education classes throughout the D. C. school system. "What SPARK has done is to give schools whose principals don't value PE as much, equipment and resources to make all PE programs successful," he said.

He said he deems himself lucky to have

received much of the equipment for his classes, in which traditional sports are offered but in a different way. "We are focusing on the skills, not so much as the games," he said. "The winners of the games are not important."

The D.C. school system also used the grant to purchase Fitnessgram, an assessment program that measures personal fitness for students in grades four and up. With it, students are tested on cardiovascular endurance, flexibility, muscular strength and endurance, and body mass. The data are collected centrally and used to analyze individual grades and geographic areas, such as wards, to see what additional resources may be needed.

Another program, called HOPSports (HOPS), a video-driven workout series, will be expanded through the federal grant to the District's public high schools. The program is already in place in some of the District's

Advertisement

Help people in need.

Donate your car, boat or RV

Free Towing • Tax Deductible

FREE
3 day vacation
to over 80
destinations





Call Toll-Free

1-877-225-9384

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/30/AR2010073004747_pf.html

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

The Washington Post

Shaping Up PE: The rise in childhood obesity prompts a gym class makeover

middle schools through funding provided by the Washington Redskins and the United Way. The HOPS curriculum, featuring such activities as Pilates and yoga, is particularly useful in schools that have limited space, school officials said. It also can be integrated into other physical education programs. Hawkins, for example, said he designed a curriculum that uses aspects of SPARK and HOPS simultaneously.

D.C. school administrators said they expect to have all three programs in place in all of the city's schools before the federal grant expires in 2012.

School officials said the system's food services program also has undergone major changes, which brings it in line with the Healthy Schools Act. But the food program did not receive additional funding. According to Tony Tata, chief operating officer of D.C. public schools, many programs outlined in the act, including serving breakfast in the classrooms, were in place or in the works when the act was passed. Jeffrey Mills, the new director of food services for D.C. public schools, has introduced several pilot programs focused on adding fresher ingredients to cafeteria food and providing more healthful, portable food for classrooms without direct access to cafeteria facilities.

Mills and Tata are confident that when these new programs are fully in place later this year, the District will have a model lunch program.

The federal grant is an instrumental force in the major renovation of physical education programs nationwide. The movement toward personal fitness in PE has occurred slowly over the past two decades, Holaday said. But the federal grant is dramatically changing the way these classes are taught.

"There's been a total 360 in the way class is conducted," she said.

Jones, the school official in Loudoun, credited the grant with helping to create a "culture and language of health and fitness," which she said will remain with the students as they advance through the grades and after they graduate.

Daniele Seiss is a member of the Magazine staff. She can be reached at seissd@washpost.com.

Advertisement

Help people in need.

Donate your car, boat or RV

Free Towing • Tax Deductible

FREE
3 day vacation
to over 80
destinations





Call Toll-Free

1-877-225-9384

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/30/AR2010073004747_pf.html

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™