

Getting Students MOVING



TOPIC: PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND ACTIVITY

DISTRICT: EAST GRAND 2

LOCATION: GRANBY, COLO.

INTRODUCTION

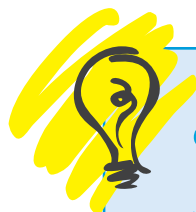
Eighty-five miles northwest of Denver, East Grand School District serves Fraser, Granby, Grand Lake, Hot Sulphur Springs, Tabernash and Winter Park—where active lifestyles are a community value. Keeping students physically active during the school day is appreciated as an essential component for health and learning.

OUR STORY

Grand County's economic base relies in large part on tourism and recreation. For visitors and residents alike, activities such as hiking, mountain biking, and water and snow sports are a way of life.

"We're an active community anyway, but the more kids move, the more likely they'll be successful in school," says the district's health and wellness coordinator Kathy Kopp. "We clearly have seen that."

Getting students moving is part of a three-pronged approach to wellness that also involves student nutrition and staff wellness.



did you know...

... that Colorado's new mandatory physical activity law (H.B. 11-1069) directs school boards to adopt policies that incorporate at least 600 minutes of physical activity into elementary school students' schedules?

Gone are vending and soda machines and high-fat school lunches. They have been replaced with menus such as whole wheat breads, soups and cut-up fresh veggies. And more than half of employees are actively involved in improving their own nutrition, emotional health and physical activity.

"Kids see adults taking part in walking clubs or yoga classes after school," says Kopp. "We're getting kids moving more, too."

The district is two years into a three-year, \$144,000 student wellness grant from the Colorado Department of Education to enhance physical education and activity. These funds help pay for Kopp's salary, equipment for students, and training for physical education teachers and members of health and wellness teams in each of the district's five schools.

“Even in these hard times, our schools still have full art, music and PE,” says Superintendent Nancy Karas. “It’s a commitment our community and district have made.”

Karas has worked at East Grand since 1981, including 15 years as the middle school principal. Now in her third year as superintendent, she says physical education definitely has a direct correlation to students’ success.

“At one point we eliminated one trimester of PE in middle school,” says Karas. “Discipline went up, and disruptive behavior went up. We were in a budget crunch, so we cut back PE. We ended up making other choices and putting it back in the schedule.”

SOLUTIONS

Posters in every classroom spell out the district’s belief statements, including this one: “Physical, mental and emotional well-being increases the ability to learn.”

Putting those words into action, East Grand requires all students at all levels to take PE. Elementary students get 30 minutes daily. At the middle school, it’s almost one hour a day. And high school students are required to take two full years of PE to graduate.

“Students either come from PE feeling refreshed or they’re looking forward to it,” says Karas.

There is also a structured 20-minute recess right before lunch at all three elementary schools and at the middle school. “We’re trying to find ways to up the physical activity time other than PE classes,” says Kopp. “We structure recess with activities like jumping rope and running laps.”

PE teacher Kris Lorens says structured recess is a success at the middle school. “Old-school relay races cost nothing. Give kids quick, detailed instructions and get going.”



did you know...

... research shows that physical activity improves students’ on-task behavior, attention and concentration?

Elementary and middle school students earn rewards such as time using their school’s Wii fitness games and free passes to community recreation centers. And when they can’t focus or if they need to get rid of “difficult” energy, students head to designated physical activity rooms with trampolines, beanbags and other equipment.

“We’re teaching kids to know when to ask for that break—to self-monitor when they need it,” says Karas. “We partnered with our occupational therapists to give kids a designated activity room, and we let kids know how and when that room can be used. There’s already a supervisor in the area, and what we’ve found is the occupational therapists enjoy it just as much as the students.”

East Grand also taps time before and after school to get students moving. “We’re trying to build up the minutes,” says Kopp. “At the high school, we have open gym at lunch and also for one hour after school on Tuesday.”

Twice a week at the middle school, teachers offer structured activities before school, like jumping rope, running laps or playing tennis. “Instead of hanging out in the commons waiting for the bell to ring, why not open the gym?” asks Lorens. “One of our health teachers and I supervise it. We have a huge turnout of 50 to 60 kids from 7 to 8 a.m.”

When it comes to in-school physical education instruction, Karas insists on using data. “PE teachers should be responsible for collecting data and understanding the health of the children they serve so their program helps their children,” she says.

In the middle school, Lorens uses the Progressive Aerobic Cardiovascular Endurance Run (PACER) test by Fitnessgram to help sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders track and measure their improvement from year to year. “It’s great for them to see their progress,” she says. “They love to see what they got last time and try to beat it.”

Lorens also works with her colleagues to get kids moving in their classrooms. “I have so much support from the other teachers and the administration, all the way up to superintendent,” she says. “It helps. Students stay on task and listen better. When they get their ya-yas out, they’re more ready to learn.”

The districtwide “spring tune” also gets students moving, both in and out of school. Themes like “movement in March,” “amp it up in April” and “a mile a day in May” keep physical activity front and center.

Sixth-graders do a “jog your mind” marathon that has them completing 26 reading and physical activity tasks throughout the community, like checking out a book from the library or walking for 30 minutes with their family. “It’s an awesome idea,” says Lorens. “They have checkpoints and color code how they’re making it through the marathon.”

Similarly, one of the elementary schools hosts a Candy Land fitness challenge. Students color in squares on their game boards when they meet certain fitness goals, like taking a walk, playing outside or drinking six glasses of water.

*“Students stay on task and listen better.
When they get their ya-yas out,
they’re more ready to learn.”*

- Kris Lorens, PE Teacher, East Grand Middle School



RESULTS

Karas says the difference is obvious when students have daily physical education: better attendance, fewer fights among students and less arguing with teachers.

“It also gives our students time to play together, which is important,” says Karas. “It’s teaching social skills and a different kind of problem-solving than math. Competing with one another gracefully is a whole different skill set.”

Many high school students choose to take more than the required two years of physical education. Some are upperclassmen who could take a period off, but don’t. Others are athletes who want year-round conditioning. “The program is good,” says Kopp. “Kids like doing it. Strength classes, lifetime sports, women’s body shaping—those are the full ones.”

Karas says it comes down to students having a variety of options and a chance to choose their own level of activity. “I think when a student gets to pick what level of sports to engage in, it engages them and they’re less intimidated,” she says.

Students say she is right. Snowboarder and high school senior Bailey Currington is enrolled in women’s body shaping. “I like that you can work at your own pace and push yourself as hard as you want to achieve your goals,” she says. “My goal is to keep up my endurance and fitness to snowboard in the winter time.”

Kopp says the increased levels of activity during the school day result in happier students who are more involved in school. “When they feel really good, they take part in more extracurricular activities,” she says.

And there’s not as much complaining. “The nurse says she sees fewer visits from kids, not the chronic cases, but the day-to-day ‘I have a stomachache and I can’t go on’ kinds of visits,” says Kopp.

WHAT’S NEXT

Kopp says the state’s new comprehensive health and physical education standards are on the district’s radar, and she and her staff are thinking about how to better measure outcomes. This fall, the district’s PE teachers will receive training to support the transition to the new standards.

In addition, she’s working with health and wellness teams at each school to promote community programs that get students involved in activities after school and on weekends.

ABOUT US

District: *East Grand 2*

Location: *Granby, Colo.*

Number of students: *1,272*

Percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch:
22 percent

BEFORE AND AFTER

Before: Students “hanging out” during recess. Candy a reward for student accomplishments. Physical activity inconsistently slotted in before- and after-school programs.

After: Recess seen as structured play that gets all students moving, like running relays, playing four square or flag football, or walking around the track. Free passes to community recreation centers or in-school breaks to play Wii fitness games given as student rewards. Activities in before- and after-school programs aligned to the state’s new physical education standards.

DOING IT FOR FREE

Access free strategies that teachers can use to get students moving in classrooms. For example, the Just-a-Minute (JAM) School Program sends weekly emails with one-minute fitness routines that students and staff can do either standing or sitting (www.jamschoolprogram.com). “Teachers have to become involved, so give them tools they can use with kids all day long to get kids moving in the classroom,” says Kopp.

ADVICE

Offering physical education daily requires thinking outside the box. Nancy Karas, superintendent, and Kathy Kopp, health and wellness coordinator, offer these suggestions:

- Find a way to fit PE into the school day. “Sit down with staff and ask them to help problem-solve to keep PE in the schedule. I believe our staff [members] are good problem-solvers. They need the kids to be the best they can be in order to do their jobs.”
- Look at ways to structure recess. “Here’s a 20-minute block of time where kids are dying to do something. Don’t let them just hang out.”
- Make sure PE teachers have professional development. “Ours go every year. We want them to know what’s out there.”
- Help classroom teachers get kids moving. “Put time and energy into classroom teachers. Whoever can get the kids out running and jumping—do it.”

“Teachers have to become involved, so give them tools they can use with kids all day long to get kids moving in the classroom.”

- Kathy Kopp, Health and Wellness Coordinator,
East Grand School District

MORE HELP

Colorado Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (COAHPERD)
www.coahperd.org/curriculum-content-organizations

Find curriculum and curriculum supplements such as Fitnessgram physical fitness tests that assess aerobic capacity, muscular strength and endurance, and flexibility.

Eat Smart, Move More

www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/Energizers/Elementary.html

www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/Energizers/Middle.html

Download free “energizers” for elementary and middle school students. Initiated by the North Carolina state board of education’s healthy, active children policy, these energizers are classroom-based activities that help teachers integrate physical activity with academic concepts.

Physical Education Quality Improvement Grant Initiative: Colorado Health Foundation

www.coloradohealth.org/pe_quality_improvement.aspx

Apply for funding to increase the number of students who engage in physical activity by improving the quality of physical education.





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