

Barry Elementary School: Changing Students’ Tomorrows by Educating Them Today

When Sara Williams realized the Energy Balance decisions her fifth graders make now may follow them in life and impact their success, she knew she had to do something. After paying extra attention to her students’ Energy In and Energy Out, her small community’s lack of knowledge about the importance of a healthy, active lifestyle became increasingly apparent.



Mrs. Williams was able to pinpoint her students’ Energy Balance needs by surveying her students about their eating habits, screen time, and daily exercise. One hundred percent of the school’s fifth grade students participated in this survey. After collecting the data, two areas were brought to the forefront of Mrs. Williams’ attention: the need to both eat a balanced breakfast each morning and increase daily physical activity.

Snap Shot of Barry Elementary

Community Snapshot	Like many towns in east-central New Mexico, Clovis’ main industries include agriculture and ranching. Clovis is also known as the home of the Cannon Air Force Base. With a 2012 population of 39,197, this community prides themselves on being welcoming and supportive.
School Type	Public
Enrollment	334
Grade Levels	K-5
School Overview	Barry Elementary is a Title 1 school with 79% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. 46% of the students are Hispanic, 41% are White, 12% are African American, and 1% are multiracial.
How Physical Education and Health are taught	Two Physical Education classes of 45 minutes per week.
FYBC Team	Sara Williams (fifth grade teacher) and Barry Elementary’s fifth grade students

Background

Mrs. Williams' students live in a high-need community. In the 2009 census, the median household income for a family was \$40,000 a year. Nearly 20% of the Clovis population is below the poverty line—and the percentage rises to 28% for those under the age of 18.

At Barry Elementary School, the gymnasium serves as the cafeteria and the auditorium. Without a designated play area, there is nowhere at the school for permanent equipment. The student body faces the challenge of remaining active on days with poor weather or planned assemblies.

Identifying the Need

Eating a nutritious breakfast is an important part of starting each day on the right note. After discovering that more than half of her students were not eating “the most important meal of the day,” Mrs. Williams identified this as the first issue to address.

The fifth graders also reported spending seven-to-nine hours per week playing video games, watching television, using hand held devices, and playing computer games. This screen time by far outweighed the 190 minutes of physical activity the students received each week at school.

Meeting the Need

Through a pilot program offered by the Clovis School District, free breakfast is offered to each student. Mrs. Williams, along with the Barry Elementary School Principal and the school's nutritional staff, met to ensure that these breakfasts were nutritious and balanced. The goal of the school breakfast was to maintain the energy and focus of each student throughout the school day.

For the Energy Out component of their action plan, the students decided to increase their weekly exercise by calculating a mile marker card. By keeping track of how far they ran or walked each day, the students had a tangible incentive that not only held them accountable for their activity, but also provided proof of their accomplishments throughout the Find Your Balance Challenge.

Once these Energy In and Energy Out priorities were set, Mrs. Williams shifted to teaching her students about Energy Balance. It was obvious to Mrs. Williams that there was a lack of knowledge among her students when it came to the concept of balancing Energy In with Energy

Out. Skipping breakfast, inadequate lunches, little exercise and excessive screen time made this apparent. By conducting key lesson plans from the Energy Balance 101 curriculum, such as *What is Energy Balance* and *Physical Activity and Energy*, Mrs. Williams and her student embarked on the first steps toward a balanced lifestyle.

Nutrition

At home

When the importance of Energy Balance is reinforced at home, there is a greater chance of long-term success for the child. For this reason, parents were encouraged to continue Barry Elementary's Find Your Balance Challenge initiative at home by helping their children make positive Energy Balance choices before and after school. To reinforce the students' decision-making process, families also kept track of their breakfast choices over the weekend. Every Monday, the fifth graders brought in their data so they could graph and analyze their weekend breakfasts with the rest of their classmates.

Not all families in the Barry Elementary community were able to easily implement these lifestyle changes at home. Because the school did not want this to hinder students and parents from participating, Barry Elementary partnered with a local food bank to implement and spearhead the "backpack program." Every Friday, qualifying students were given a backpack filled with nutritious snacks and meals to enjoy with their families over the weekend. No matter what the economic background of the students, Barry Elementary wanted to ensure success in their Energy Balance efforts.

At School

As mentioned previously, Barry Elementary is a part of a district-wide pilot program that provides free breakfast to all students. A conscious effort was made by school administrators and the school nutritional staff to ensure that the breakfast provided had the nutritional value needed to support the students. Once these balanced breakfasts began, students and teachers began to notice a difference in their overall energy and focus throughout the school day.



Physical Fitness Challenge

Mrs. Williams' husband is in the Air Force, so her husband's job reminds her daily of the importance of physical fitness. To reinforce this among her students, Mrs. Williams invited her husband's squadron to speak to the fifth graders about living an active lifestyle. During their time with the students, the squadron underscored the importance of being active, led the students in a range of activities, and administered a modified physical fitness test.

This mock physical training test was designed to show students where they stand compared to others in their age range. The fitness test was performed twice: once at the beginning and once at the end of their Energy Balance initiative. Even some teachers participated!

The pretest results were less than satisfactory. Only 35% of the students reached their fitness goals. However, after a month of nutritious breakfasts, mile markers, and increased physical activity, an outstanding 89% of students met their goal!

The military volunteers are now a part of the Barry Elementary community. (Some even judged the school's science fair!) The airmen keep in touch with the students through Mrs. Williams and encourage the fifth graders to continue their healthy, active lifestyles.



Looking Ahead

Barry Elementary hopes to use their prize money from the Find Your Balance Challenge toward new playground equipment, which will enable all of their students to enjoy physical activity during school, as well as afterschool and on weekends.

Mrs. Williams acknowledges that the impact of her school's participation in the Find Your Balance Challenge will extend far beyond their new playground equipment.

“We are confident that our students’ participation in this challenge will stay with them throughout their lives, and that they will continue to stay healthy and active,” said Mrs. Williams. “As a school, we also want to continue our healthy habits and lessons with future classes and students. Our school has learned so much through the Energy Balance program, and we want to continue all of our successes not only within our classrooms but within our community as well.”

