

Central Elementary School: What Fitness FANATICS Can Achieve When They Don't Curb Their Enthusiasm

Snapshot of Central Elementary

Central Elementary School in Seagoville, Texas is located in a community with significant financial challenges. At the time of the 2000 Census, the median household income in the town was a little over \$40,000 a year. Almost 12 percent of the population was living under the poverty line, including more than 13 percent of those under the age of 18. Eighty percent of the students at Central Elementary are eligible for free or reduced-- -cost lunches.

The lack of financial resources translates into a dearth of facilities for physical activity. In fact, there is nowhere in the town for families to walk together other than a small park next door to the federal prison. Obviously, that can get quite awkward!

But as Central Elementary counselor Tonya Krause points out: "Our students may be less wealthy than students in other schools and districts, but what they lack in money they more than make up for in enthusiasm and willingness to learn."

Central students put that enthusiasm to work in organizing The FANATICS (Fitness And Nutrition Activities To Increase Childhood Success.) The FANATICS had a clear set of goals, focused on improving health through nutrition and fitness. The FANATICS represent Central in Destination Imagination, aimed at encouraging students to address community needs. The Central team's commitment to improved health and fitness carried them to victory at the Texas Destination Imagination championship competition, demonstrating the power of "enthusiasm and willingness to learn."

Community Snapshot

School Type	Elementary
Enrollment	478
Grade Levels	PK-- -5



How PE and Health are Taught

PE is taught in conjunction with health, with students attending health-- -PE classes three days per week for 45-- -minute periods, both indoor and outdoor.

Background

Students at Central Elementary had few community resources to help them achieve physical fitness, and living in a city with a per capita income of a little over \$17,000, little hops of obtaining them. When Central launched its physical fitness project, only 1 in 10 students could jump rope continuously for one minute. But they did have a school administration and staff that recognized the importance of being physically fit. What's more, they understood the link between healthy bodies and healthy minds.

Identifying The Need

Upon learning of the Find Your Balance challenge, Central Elementary administration and staff stepped up their own plans to help the school's students become physically active. The first thing they did was assemble a student-lead challenge team (The FANATICS) to help lead the effort. The team conducted a survey of the student body, and found out how great the need was for energy balance.



The surveys found that only 25 percent of Central students eat 3--5 servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Some students said the only time they got fruit was at school. The surveys also determined that the students play outside on average 2--3 times per week for 1--2 hours, compared to 6--8 hours they spend playing video games or watching TV. Central staff was especially alarmed to learn that today's generation of unhealthy kids could be the first generation not to outlive their parents due to unhealthy eating habits and lack of physical exercise. Their reaction: We have to do something about this!

Meeting the Need

Central Elementary staff began the march to fitness by turning to Energy Balance 101, using the lessons Physical Activity and Energy and Energy Balance in Your Life. To help students (and staff, because they freely acknowledge they needed it too) develop the goals and action plan, they used the lesson Your Energy Balance Goal. The school wellness team, along with the Destination Imagination team, conducted the lesson Energy Plus! to teach students about nutrients and Nutrition Facts Panels. And coaches and teachers helped incorporate parts of Physical Activity and Energy into their daily warm--ups – including dance drills in the classroom! It's much like a fire drill, except when the alarm goes off, students – and teachers – get up and dance beside their chairs! Students getting rid of some of this nervous, stored energy could even help teachers by having students recharged and re--focused, and it only takes a few minutes.

The fitness team – The FANATICS, composed of students, staff, and community members – developed a goal statement. The physical activity goal called for students to increase the amount of exercise they engage in. The nutrition goal called on all students to choose only vegetables or fruit for snack time. To increase the likelihood of success, The FANATICS are working with cafeteria staff to serve ice cream only once a week.

The Central Elementary effort was guided by a plan composed of a series of clear steps:

1. Creating a school calendar of events.
2. Write up a pledge and persuade the entire school body to sign on to it.
3. Stage a kick--off party to educate staff, students, and parents and promote physical activities that get the body moving and heart rates up. Visitor booths were set up to help train everyone on the benefits of physical activity and healthier lifestyle choices.

Newsletters provided parents with tips on activities they could engage in with their children and ideas how to track activities they participate in together.

To keep up the momentum, a Family Fitness and Food Day was staged, where everyone brought a healthy picnic meal.

A team of staff, students, and community members are also working closely with nutritional services to decorate the cafeteria and gym with promotional materials, highlighting upcoming events to keep physical activities and healthier choices in the limelight.

In Art classes, students create silhouette posters of athletic poses such as a gymnast, swimmer, runner, field and event person, basketball player to decorate the gym and promote activities and highlight the variety of activities we will or can go through on our way to fitness.

A point system rewards students for tracking physical activity events they participate in at home – awarding points that students can spend on pedometers, jump ropes, and tickets to special events like student/teacher basketball games or jump rope contests.

A time and place is being designated for students to run a few laps before school starts.

FITNESSGRAMS® (assessments of physical fitness) are sent out at least once per year to parents. Fitnessgrams measure starting data points for overall health and BMI. At the end of the year, students are given another Fitnessgram, with the data compared for improvement.

The Results

To measure success regarding student nutrition, every student records their snacks on a daily basis, with the percentage of students who meet the goal and the percentage of days overall that students eat fruits and vegetables each week tracked. Goals are posted in the cafeteria, with progress made toward them displayed in the cafeteria on a daily basis.

To measure success regarding physical activity, each student fills out an exercise log, including activities students do on their own, as well as bonus opportunities for activities that include parents, siblings, and friends. Certificates will be awarded to students and staff for goal completion every six weeks. Exercise choices include a balance of activities that can be undertaken with or without equipment, and those that can be participated in individually and as part of a team.

A new school fitness center includes an Energy Balance scale, with a



wall devoted to the school's food and activity goals and for results. Results will also be published in the local community newspaper.

Each student's first Fitnessgram has been completed, establishing a data point. All students, parents and staff have been trained, and have signed pledges. Forty-- -three percent of students met the nutrition goal the first week, 62 percent the second week, 81 percent the third week, and 94 percent the fourth week. Regarding physical activity, all students met the designated total of minutes during the first and second weeks. That declined to 89 percent the third week, but came back to 100 percent for the fourth and fifth weeks.

Support from the Community

Community support included a \$1500 annual grant (for three years) from The United Way, allowing Central Elementary to continue to promote health and fitness, include purchasing healthy snacks for taste tests or promotional items like pedometers and other awards. Sponsors are also committed to starting a Walk/Run Club – a morning running club to get students (and teachers) revved up for the day.

The Impact of the Prize Money

“Students in this area are easily excited over even the smallest tokens,” says Counselor Tonya Krause. “But the FYB grant of \$5,000 and the sports equipment overwhelmed them.”

The FYB grant will be used in several ways to enable students to become healthier, including:

Completion of the purchase of fitness equipment for use before and after school, as well as for groups throughout the day.

Purchase of new playground equipment, and potentially construction of a walking trail, so families in the town can walk together someplace not in the vicinity of the prison.

Purchase of fruits and vegetables for snack time throughout the school year.

Lessons Learned

One of the most important lessons learned from Central Elementary's success is that students themselves – fired up in enthusiasm, working on the basis of a goal and a plan they helped devise – can achieve a great deal.