



St. Philip the Apostle: Strong and Smart Second Graders Eat the Rainbow and Get Active!

St. Philip the Apostle is a private Catholic school located in Addison, a suburb of Chicago. The school has an enrollment of 330 students spanning preschool through eighth grade. The school strives to “encourage the unique gifts and talents of their students, helping them to reach their fullest potential.” This year, St. Philip’s second grade class reached that potential with their Find Your Balance Challenge (FYBC) entry entitled “Somewhere over the rainbow ... we’ll be playing.” Their efforts resulted in a runners up finish in the FYBC.



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Physical Education
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St Philip the Apostle: Strong and Smart Second Graders Eat the Rainbow and Get Active!

Founded in 1965, St. Philip the Apostle is a private Catholic school located in Addison, a suburb of Chicago. The school has an enrollment of 330 students spanning pre-school through eighth grade. There is one class for every grade level, with 28 faculty members. St. Philip the Apostle strives to “encourage the unique gifts and talents of their students, helping them to reach their fullest potential.” This year, St. Philip’s second grade class reached that potential with their Find Your Balance Challenge entry entitled “Somewhere over the rainbow ... we’ll be playing” a *Find Your Balance Challenge* (FYBC) winner.

Snapshot of St. Philip the Apostle

Community Snapshot	Addison is located west of Chicago with a population of approximately 37,000 residents. The community is 47.5% white, 40.1% Hispanic, 7.3% Asian, 3.7% African American. Ancestral heritage is 16% Italian and 12.9% Polish 8.8% Irish. The median household income of Addison residents is \$60,263. Addison’s top employer is UPS. The most common industries are manufacturing, construction and retail trade.
School Type	Private
Enrollment	330
Grade levels	Preschool through 8th grade
School overview	At St Philip the Apostle, 89% of students are white, 5% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and 1% multiracial.
How Physical Education and Health are taught	All students in grades K-8 participate in Physical Education twice a week for 45 minutes. Health concepts are addressed in regular classrooms, as appropriate.
FYBC Team	Robert Reisenbuechler- Principal Cathy Sheehan- Physical Education/Art Teacher Amanda Koulter- Second Grade Teacher St. Philip second grade students



Background

When Cathy Sheehan, St. Philip's Physical Education and Art teacher, was first presented with the *Find Your Balance Challenge* by her school's development manager Dawn O'Brien, she knew exactly which group of students would be up for the task. **"We have a great, excited group of students in the second grade, and I knew they would be on board and would take off with the project, which they did."** said Sheehan. Early on in the process, the class decided to give themselves a team name to reinforce the goals they were trying to achieve. They became the "Strong and Smart Second Graders," to reflect the smart decisions they were going to make and the impact of those decisions on their bodies.

According to Principal Robert Reisenbuechler, what Catholic schools typically lack in funds, they more than make up for in spirit and initiative.

"The school is like a family atmosphere. Once we find a program we like, everybody in the school chips in and gets it done," said Reisenbuechler. So it was no surprise to him that Cathy Sheehan and the *Find Your Balance* team at St. Philips dove right in to help the kids with their project. As a private school, there is no mandated wellness plan at St. Philip. There is no extensive lunch program, nor even a meal plan.



Sheehan called the *Challenge* a perfect way to reinforce her personal goal of teaching lifelong skills to her students about balancing what they eat with being active. **"The fact that it would reach families and get the entire community on board was a huge bonus,"** said Sheehan. "The St. Philip's community is a big Italian community, and food is a very important part of the culture. My goal is to teach the kids about variety and moderation as they make their food choices, and many of the Energy Balance lessons I found on the website helped me do that." Sheehan also wanted to get families moving together and she thought the Challenge could be the perfect kick start.



The Need

The first step in the *Find Your Balance Challenge* was to identify needs on both the food and physical activity sides of the Energy Balance scale. The Strong and Smart Second graders jumped right in. Their first step? A food audit. They carried their lunchboxes to the gym and placed every item in front of them. On a big white board,

Mrs. Sheehan listed all of the foods and beverages before them. **The students reviewed the list and immediately noticed that there were not enough colorful fruits and vegetables.** So they identified that, on the nutrition side of the scale, they needed to add more colorful fruits and vegetables into their diets. When asked why adding more color to her diet would be a good idea, second grader Ashley Mawr said, “Because eating lots of colors is healthy.” The color she and her twin brother, Kyle, thought would be hardest to get? Purple!

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The Strong and Smart Second graders then examined the activity side of the Energy Balance scale by using pedometers and tracking their activities for a one-day period. **They realized that the cold, Midwestern winters were preventing them from getting enough activity, particularly aerobic activity, each day.**

Students were already familiar with Play 60, the NFL’s initiative to encourage 60 minutes of activity each day, and their tracking sheets revealed they were not getting 60 minutes of activity each day. The Strong and Smart Second Graders were ready to get to work.

Ready. Set. Goal!

The next step was for the students to design specific goals. They decided that their nutrition goal would be to eat every color of the rainbow each week for a three-week period. Mrs. Sheehan added in percentages: 70 percent of students the first week would eat every color of the rainbow, 80 percent the second week and 90 percent the third week. The colors provided an easy way for the kids to ensure that they were choosing a variety of healthy foods.

On the physical activity side, the goal was for those same percentages of students to be physically active for at least 60 minutes each day.





The Plan

Mrs. Sheehan knew that the development of a tracking system that was easy for the kids to manage would be a big part of the success of the plan. She designed two easy-to-use tracking sheets.

The food tracking sheet included a chart with each color. Students were given stickers each week and their job was to put a sticker by each color each time they ate that food. That way they could see which colors were already a big part of their diet and which they needed to eat more of.

For the physical activity side, students tracked which activities they did each day and for how many minutes. They worked together to see if they had reached 60 minutes the day before. At the end of each week for three weeks, parents were required to sign off. Students then turned in their tracking sheets, and their progress was transferred onto a large poster inside the classroom.

Principal Reisenbuechler remembers looking at the tracking sheets and listening to the kids talk about getting more purples or making sure they could get their minutes in before a particular rainy day. That's when he knew this could work.

Throughout the three-week period, Mrs. Sheehan also used Energy Balance 101 lesson plans with the students to reinforce the lessons she was trying to teach about self-esteem, balance, variety and moderation.

The Community

One of Mrs. Sheehan's hopes with this *Challenge* was to extend the dialogue about Energy Balance to the home and community. To begin that process, parents were required to sign off on the tracking sheets each week. Candace Mawr, mother of two students, loved the tracking sheets. "I had always packed healthy lunches," she said. **"But the rainbow tracking system made me really pay attention to the colors I was packing. At every meal, my family began to identify the colors we were eating.** And we still do it. The tracking on the activity side was

great too. It made me realize that my kids were not getting enough activity on certain days so, on those days, we did a video fitness game and had a blast!"





In addition to simply signing off on the kids' tracking sheets, Mrs. Sheehan wanted parents to try new foods and move more, too. That's where the St. Philip Family Nights came in. **With the help of the second graders and the rest of the team, she planned two Family Nights where parents tasted new foods, participated in activities, and listened to presentations from the Strong and Smart Second graders about what they learned.** More than 100 people attended the first family night, and close to 70 attended the second. Parent Candace Mawr called the Family

Nights a "huge success." She particularly loved dancing with the DJ, trying the Zumba class and showing her kids that she really could keep up with them. Or at least she could try. "I've never been as sore as I was after that Zumba class," said Mawr, "but I loved trying something new alongside my kids."

Connections to Energy Balance began to form in other areas of the kids' lives as well. "Now when my coach tells me to make sure I am fueled up before games, I understand what he means," shared Kyle Mawr. Mom Candace said the *Challenge* has been a huge "aha moment" for both of her kids.



The Results

When asked what he thought was the best part of the project, second-grader Kyle Mawr said it best: **"Now I put good food in so I can get energy out."** Other quantitative and anecdotal results included:

- 100% of the students who turned in the rainbow and physical activity sheets increased both the variety of foods eaten and the amount of time engaging in physical activity.
- Kids began to try more foods so they could get new colors. Kyle Mawr tried zucchini for the first time to make sure he got his purple square checked off.
- Students tried new activities and increased the number of minutes of aerobic activity each day.
- There were more than 100 family members at the first family night and 70 at the second.
- According to parent Candace Mawr, the *Find Your Balance Challenge* has made a lasting difference for her family. Even though the official tracking is over, her family continues to identify every color they are eating at every meal. And her second graders continue to make sure they are staying active every day. "It's a simple concept that made me much more aware."



The Impact of the Prize Money

St. Philip's typical annual budget for Physical Education is \$300. With that said, this \$10,000 Find Your Balance Challenge grant was beyond Principal Reisenbeuchler's wildest dreams! The money will all go directly to the St. Philip Physical Education program, allowing them to purchase new equipment, new balls, new units, and a variety of other things. It will even allow them to introduce new sports and new activities to students. Reisenbeuchler says that the success of the Northwestern University lacrosse team has gotten a lot of the St. Philip's kids excited about the sport, but there was never any money to invest in equipment. Now, thanks to the *Find Your Balance Challenge*, St. Philip's students will be playing lacrosse next year.

Lessons learned: How to Replicate this Success in your Community



Every school is different, but the *Find Your Balance Challenge* team at St. Philip's points to several key success factors to help other schools:

Teamwork. Make sure that all stakeholders are involved from the start. Discuss the project at staff meetings, team meetings, and in written communications. Everyone who works with the kids has to buy in from the start so that there is one cohesive message.

Knowledge. Make sure students understand what Energy Balance is and what each side of the scale represents. According to Cathy Sheehan, the lesson plans on the Together Counts site were a huge help in introducing the topics. Everything was mapped out and the Instant Expert segments gave her a quick, in-depth overview of every topic and made her feel confident teaching them.

Student-Driven. Make sure the students drive the project, no matter how young they are. This project was really designed and led by the students. They identified the needs, picked the goals, and encouraged other students and family members to meet those goals.

Manageable. Make the goals manageable. St. Philip's stuck to colors and numbers, something to which the kids could relate. The student tracking sheets encouraged accountability and the large poster in the classroom encouraged participation.