

# SMART FROM THE START

HEALTHY DECISIONS. HEALTHY HABITS.

## Treadwell Elementary School: Setting Students on a Path to Healthy Living

Students at Treadwell Elementary School, a magnet school in one of the poorest counties in Tennessee, faced many challenges to their path to nutritional and physical well-being. A lack of equipment to use in inclement weather and a limited supply of healthy food meant their students didn't have the resources to stay healthy at school. "On the whole there is a desperate need for connection to nutrition and physical activity," said Dr. Tanisha Heaston, the school's principal. "It is our goal to create an educational tie between the two and marry them with action."



Treadwell Elementary School offers West Tennessee's only Dual Language Immersion Program given its large population of native Spanish speakers. By utilizing the Together Counts™ lessons in both English and Spanish, getting educators and parents involved in teaching students healthy habits, and implementing a plan to buy necessary exercise equipment so children can stay active regardless of the weather, Dr. Heaston was determined to help make a healthy lifestyle a reality for all of her students.

### Snapshot of Treadwell Elementary School

School Overview	Treadwell Elementary School is a public magnet school in Memphis, TN. 95% of the students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Treadwell's student body is 70% Black/African American, 25% Hispanic/Latino American and 3% Caucasian/White.
School Type	Public magnet school
Enrollment	693
Grade Levels	Pre-K- 5 <sup>th</sup> grade
Community Snapshot	Shelby County (population of 927,644 as of the 2010 census) lies on the East Bank of the Mississippi river in the metropolitan area of Memphis, Tennessee. Although Memphis is a robust industrial hub, Shelby County ranked 90 <sup>th</sup> out of 95 counties in terms of social and economic factors of wellbeing (including high school graduation, unemployment, children in poverty and violent crime).
SFTS Team	Dr. Tanisha Heaston, Principal

## Background

Treadwell Elementary sits in the center of a high-need community near Memphis, Tennessee. The school ranked 897<sup>th</sup> out of 966 elementary schools for state reading and math exams, putting the school in the bottom 10% of all elementary schools in Tennessee. There is also a projected budget gap of \$40 million in the district for the coming school year, which Superintendent Dorsey Hopson says will be difficult to close without impacting classrooms.

In terms of overall social & economic factors, Shelby County is ranked 90<sup>th</sup> out of 95 counties and 66<sup>th</sup> in terms of health factors. The area has a largely lower middle class demographic; 23% of the region lives below the poverty level, compared to 14.5% of Americans nationwide. 95% of the student body qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch, significantly higher than the state average of 61.3%.

## Identifying the Need

Treadwell Elementary lacked both the resources and the space to give its students a place to play. The school opened its doors in 1939, and the grounds were never renovated to accommodate changing student needs. Dr. Heaston noted how students are in school 8 hours a day, with little time spent moving or being active. Although students used hula hoops, bouncing balls and jump ropes to play games indoors, the preschoolers lacked a place to play during rainy days.

Though a government grant and Treadwell's community garden helped subsidize the need for healthy food, students still lacked access to fresh fruits and vegetables five days a week. This was also an impediment to children's performance in the classroom; studies have linked students' improvement in literacy tests with adequate consumption of fruit, vegetables, protein and fiber. The ultimate goal for Heaston is to help students practice balance, variety and moderation in their eating and get more daily physical activity to start on a lifelong path of healthy habits.

## Meeting the Need

### Physical Activity

When Treadwell Elementary School formed a plan for the Smart from the Start Awards, the goal was to help teach students healthy habits through changes to nutrition and physical activity. When developing the plan for preschoolers, Dr. Heaston and the other educators

increased physical activity levels by incorporating activities into classrooms on a daily basis. Teachers also held in-class discussions about the importance of eating well and exercising. Students set and achieved goals, and actively participated in bettering their health. Heaston hopes this process of goal-setting and achievement in personal activity will help students to set long-term health goals that stretch past the end of the school year.

## **Nutrition**

To complement the physical activity ideas mentioned above, Treadwell implemented a number of changes to improve in-school nutrition. The school started a community garden tended by National 4-H Council members alongside teachers and community members so the students have an additional supply of vegetables. During mealtimes, preschoolers now identify which food groups are on their plate.

Understanding that healthy habits must last longer than just the school day, Treadwell partnered with Community Kitchen to provide meals for parents and discuss the importance of healthy eating and living. Parents are also invited to eat with their children to help mealtime become more community-oriented, and have and discussion sessions with parents about the importance of healthy eating.

## **Looking Ahead**

With the Smart from the Start grant, Treadwell hopes to continue to foster healthy habits in all its students. According to Dr. Heaston, the goal is to expose students to the long-term benefits of eating in moderation and making healthy and balanced nutritional choices. She believes combining nutritional education with exercise will help students stay balanced emotionally, socially, and physically as they grow.

Treadwell plans to implement a daily 30-minute Smart from the Start curriculum component to continuously reinforce learning. They also plan to use the funds to provide an outdoor playground for all students as well as an indoor playground for the early childhood center alongside classroom play bins with equipment for each class, so students can stay active regardless of the weather. The school also intends to use the grant to supplement the existing Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program with the creation of the “Treadwell Snack Shack,” where students can go to select healthy snacks from the bar during their snack time, as well as buy seeds to plant in their community garden.

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Dr. Heaston hopes, most of all, that these steps will help change students' lives. "Tying what we do have with what we are asking for will help our vision become a reality and most importantly impact over 650 students, touching homes in our community, our state of Tennessee, as well as our entire nation."

