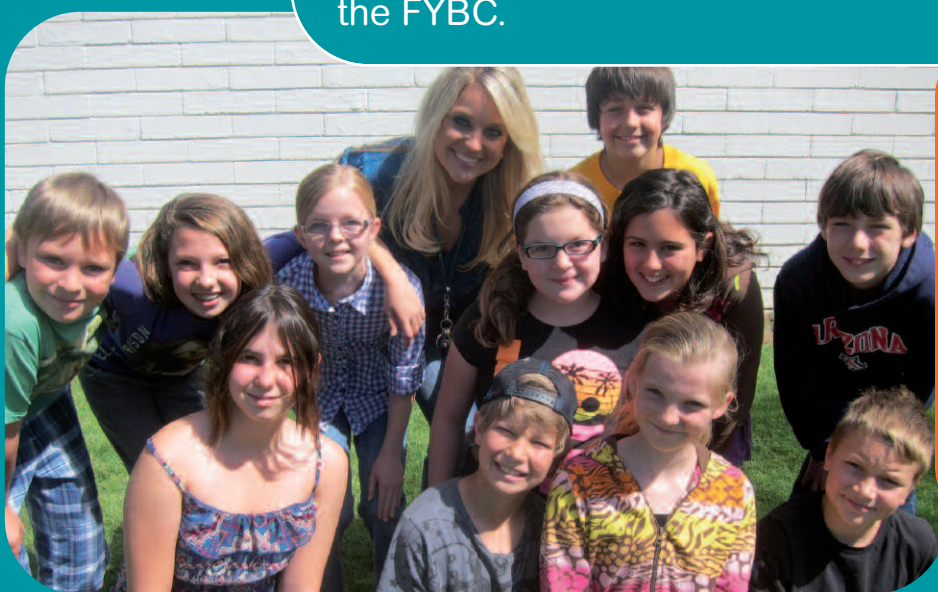




Green Fields Country Day School: Eat Breakfast. Play Soccer. Get Equipment For Your School!

Green Fields Country Day is an independent, co-ed day school located outside of Tucson, Arizona. This year, their fifth grade students began a study of Energy Balance which coincided with the Find Your Balance Challenge (FYBC). They instituted a school-wide Breakfast Market, encouraged 100% participation in the after-school soccer club, and designed and taught lessons about Energy Balance to the rest of the school. Their efforts resulted in a runners up finish in the FYBC.



“I knew that winning a grant would be amazing, but I wanted the students to learn about the relationship between food, activity, and energy.”

— *Principal
Carly Parsons*



Green Fields Country Day School: Eat Breakfast. Play Soccer. Get Equipment For Your School!

Founded in 1933, Green Fields Country Day is an independent, co-ed day school located on 22 acres outside of Tucson, Arizona. A strong sense of community pervades campus life at Green Fields. Strong parental involvement strengthens this bond and financial aid encourages socioeconomic diversity. The school is divided into three sections: a lower school, middle school, and upper school. This year, Green Fields fifth grade students began a study of Energy Balance which coincided with the *Find Your Balance Challenge*. **For the first several months of the project, students had no idea that their work was part of a national contest.** They simply thought they were creating positive changes toward school wellness. Along the way, they instituted a school-wide Breakfast Market, encouraged 100% participation in the after-school soccer club, designed and taught lessons about Energy Balance to the rest of the school, and helped the entire school community balance nutritional choices with increased activity.

Snapshot of Green Fields Day

Community Snapshot	Tucson is the second largest city in Arizona. Its population is 520,116. The median household income is \$35,565. Tucson residents are 47.2% white, 41.6% Hispanic, and 4.5% African American. Tucson's most common industries are construction, accommodation/food services, and educational services.
School Type	Independent
Enrollment	189
Grade levels	K-12
School overview	Green Fields Country Day is an independent day school where more than one quarter of the student body receives financial aid. 78.3% of students are white, 17.9% Hispanic, and 1.06% African American.
How Physical Education and Health are taught	All students in the lower school (K-5) participate in PE for 45 minutes every day. Fourth and fifth graders also participate in dedicated health classes, with nutrition and exercise falling into the fifth grade health curriculum.
FYBC Team	Carly Parsons- Physical Education teacher Sally Miller- Fourth grade teacher Green Fields fifth grade students



Background

When physical education and health teacher Carly Parsons was first sent information about the *Find Your Balance Challenge*, she said to herself, “This is the perfect year to do this.” Faced with virtually no physical education funds, the second-year teacher felt she and her students had nothing to lose and everything to gain, even if the small country day school did not win.

Although Green Fields has been around for nearly 80 years, its lower school is only six years old, which is why Green Fields physical education facilities are limited for younger children. Ms. Parsons knew that the challenge grant could really make a difference for her students. But she didn’t want the prize money to drive student interest in the project.



“First and foremost, I wanted this to be a learning project for our students and I wanted it to be completely student-driven. I didn’t even tell them it was a contest until we were finished,” said Parsons. **“I knew that winning a grant would be amazing, but I wanted the students to learn about the relationship between food, activity, and energy.** While the school offers a daily physical education program to all students, Parsons admitted that many students do not balance nutritional needs with the body’s physical demands. “They may not be gaining their full potential.” The *Challenge* also supported Parson’s personal philosophy of teaching the whole child, not just the academic side.

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The Need

Parsons first introduced the concept of Energy Balance to Green Fields' fifth graders in November, 2011 to gauge student interest. She knew the project would take a commitment and did not want to embark on it unless students were genuinely interested. She was happy to learn that they were. The fifth grade team got right to work.

The first step was to identify needs on both sides of the Energy Balance scale.

Parsons began by asking students what they could do to better themselves on both the food side and the activity side. One student quickly said, "If I don't eat breakfast, I don't get anything to eat until lunch." Several students chimed in that they didn't always eat breakfast and they often felt tired throughout the day. Green Field's food distribution is different than most schools. There is no cafeteria on campus and no breakfast option. Most students bring their own lunches and the rest get food from local businesses that are contracted with the school. The class began to discuss how eating a balanced breakfast affects them in a good way – academically, emotionally, and physically. The project on the food side became a genesis of those discussions.

In order to obtain genuine data, Ms. Parsons asked students to log what they ate for breakfast every day for one week. **"We learned that no one in the class was eating a balanced breakfast every day – and only a couple of students were eating a balanced breakfast sometime during the week."** A balanced breakfast was defined as including a protein, whole grain and fruit. Physical education was their first class of the day. Students admitted to feeling sluggish some mornings. This led them to pay more attention to what they ate before class. "Few students were aware that eating a balanced breakfast would give them more energy for school," Parsons said.

On the activity side, students began with discussions about their existing activity level. They then decided to survey the student body to learn more about what motivates children to be active. They compared their curriculum and schedule to several other schools in the area and learned that Green Fields physical education and health program was much more consistent than the average school. However, **students found the activity options in their physical education classes to be limited. This limited their desire to be active.** Students predicted they could encourage more activity with high-interest choices.

Ready. Set. Goal!

The next step was for the students to design specific goals for the project. The nutrition goal would be to provide a balanced breakfast model for the entire school community, using a Breakfast Market, and to raise community awareness about what a balanced breakfast was.

On the physical activity side, their goal was for all 11 fifth graders to model daily activity by participating fully in physical education classes and joining the after school soccer team from November until January.



The Plan

Students tracked what they ate and found that with a balanced breakfast they indeed had more energy for PE. They conducted tests to measure how eating breakfast impacted their performance in circuit training. To achieve a goal of physical activity both in the morning at PE and in the afternoon, the class researched available options and discussed what motivates children to be active. Then they collectively decided that 100 percent of the class would join and participate in the after-school soccer club.

Next, the fifth graders surveyed kindergarten through fourth grade students about their breakfast routines and activity levels. They provided mini-lessons

for the younger students about the importance of a balanced breakfast and daily physical activity.

That led the class to design a Breakfast Market for campus – offering a balanced breakfast for just \$2 – with a variety of whole grains, protein and fruit choices. Students designed the menu, set prices, designed the space, and advertised. They detailed their plan in a letter to parents to request donations to fund the market. Then they were in business for one week, presenting the Breakfast Market to the entire K-12 school community to sample balanced nutrition.

Only then did Parsons reveal that this class project could be Green Fields' entry in the national grant contest offering a grand prize of \$30,000. The students were “beyond excited,” quickly realizing that their hard work could not only change behaviors but also win money for their school.



The Community

The definition of a country day school is based on community and family involvement and, according to Parsons, many staff members at Green Fields rely on the community for their support of projects like these. No one was disappointed with the support given to the *Find Your Balance Challenge*.

Parents were eager to donate products and money to the Breakfast Market and were also excited that their kids were being taught this life skill. In fact, many parents admitted that they had struggled with getting their kids to eat breakfast.

Each student in the class also reached out to his or her family members to take the “Together Counts”™ pledge and set up family groups on the “Together Counts” website so that the learning in school could be replicated at home.



The Results

- Students created a class group on the “Together Counts” web site to track their goals. Their goal to eat a balanced breakfast and be physically active twice daily was met nearly every day.
- The Breakfast Market was a huge success and plans are underway to make it a permanent school program five days a week.
- 100% of fifth graders joined and continued to participate daily from November through January in the after-school soccer club.
- The Energy Balance project has become a legacy at the school and this year’s fourth graders have already asked what they can do next year to continue this legacy.
- There is a school-wide excitement about eating a balanced breakfast and being active.
- Parents are more educated about Energy Balance and have committed to help with balanced meals at home.

The Impact of the Prize Money

To keep the learning authentic, Ms. Parsons chose not to share any information about a possible grant with students until they were finished. On a kayaking trip during Green Fields’ annual Interim week (where all students complete a week-long educational adventure), Ms. Parsons’ phone rang and she learned that Green Fields had won a runner-up grant. She thinks everyone on the river heard her screams of delight!

Her principal’s reaction? Tears of joy. **She was amazed at how ten and eleven-year-olds were able to make such a difference for the whole school.** The grant money truly “sparked our little school and it was much needed.” Ms. Parsons added, **“The current physical education program supports older students in our upper school with very little equipment or space designated for younger children.** In order to fully utilize a physical education program, we need developmentally appropriate equipment like balls, a climbing gym, a dance/movement space with tumbling mats and sound system, game equipment and ideally a separate indoor space designated for our lower school students. Right now we share an over-scheduled space with middle and high school students, limiting our time and potential. We also need drinking fountains for children to hydrate themselves.”

Asked about the grant money, Parsons elaborates, **“Now we will be able to get all of the equipment that our youngest students really need, especially our K-2 students.** They can really flourish from using balls and equipment designed for kids their age. This grant allows us to purchase so much of what we need.” She also shared that the funding would go toward a permanent Breakfast Market for the whole school.



Lessons learned: How to Replicate this Success in your Community

Every school is different, but the *Find Your Balance Challenge team* at Green Fields points to several key success factors to help other schools:

Student-Driven. Make sure the students drive the project, no matter how young they are. Ms. Parsons described this project as coming directly from “students’ hearts and minds.” 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. She advised other schools to have students find a purpose and make it about them.

“Make sure the students drive the project, no matter how young they are.”

—Principal Carly Parsons

Educate the Kids Every Step of the Way.

Parsons chose not to tell the students about the contest/grant element of the project until they were finished. She really wanted them to build a genuine connection to the importance of Energy Balance, aside from the grant money.

School Support. It’s important to educate school administration and staff early on about the project so that everyone is on the same team.

Give Yourself Enough Time. With so many different project ideas, some are bound to take additional time. The Green Fields Energy Balance project took several months. Parsons advises teachers to make sure they allow enough time to really select and implement a project that will make an authentic difference for their specific school community.

