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The case for exercise

Written by [Kelley Atherton](#), [The Triplicate](#) January 29, 2010 05:46 pm

Educators look at encouraging active students



Moriah France exercises during a P.E. dance class at Del Norte High School. The Daily Triplicate/Bryant Anderson

P.E. teachers encourage students to be physically active for the health benefits and to build life-long habits.

Brett Schan, a sophomore at Del Norte High School, doesn't need much coaxing — he already knows about the implications of a sedentary lifestyle.

"I like to work out," he said. "It helps with my diabetes."

Schan was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes when he was 4. Physical activity controls blood sugar levels and can help keep him from feeling sick.

Schan doesn't play interscholastic sports, but makes it a point to exercise to not only be healthy, but also build muscle.

"It keeps me in shape so I don't get big," he said.

Plenty of his fellow students, however, need more convincing.

At one of Schan's recent weightlifting classes, male and female students tested their muscle strength in a series of exercises.

Next door in the dance studio, rows of girls were lying on their sides, making circles with one leg suspended in the air.

In one of the high school's gyms, ninth-graders played badminton

Just a typical day in the world of high school gym class.

Clocking time in P.E.

P.E. has long been a requirement for public school students. In recent years, the state has deemed it an important tool in fighting childhood obesity.

"Physical education has changed in California," said Don Olson, assistant superintendent of curriculum and

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Lifting weights in P.E., Brett Schan says he's warding off the effects of diabetes. The Daily TriPLICATE/Bryant Anderson

instruction for Del Norte County Unified School District.

State law requires that students in grades 1-8 get 100 minutes of P.E. every week. In high school, students have to have 200 minutes every week, unless they are exempted.

Most students are actually getting more physical activity than what's required, Olson said, because daily classes are longer than 20 or 40 minutes.

All ninth-graders have to take P.E., but there are alternatives for older students, such as weightlifting and dance.

Schools are also trying different ways to get kids active during P.E. classes. Some take students bowling. Sunset Continuation High School has a Nintendo Wii that gets students moving while playing a game.

The Network for a Healthy California program also provides teachers with resources to do quick exercises with students in the classroom.

Learning basketball and playing tag

At local elementary schools, P.E. consists of motor skills like hopping and skipping for younger students and team sports like football and basketball for the older ones, explained P.E. instructor Blaine Lopez.

Fourth-graders also take a swimming class at the local pool, said Superintendent Jan Moorehouse.

"It's an introduction to a whole new physical activity," she said.

Lopez goes to three elementary schools a week. Each of his classes starts with a warm-up, then students learn a skill or play a game before finishing with a cool-down.

"They love playing games ... especially the tag games," Lopez said. "They don't realize how much exercise they're getting."

Lopez talks to students about why exercise is important to strengthen the heart, for example, but the point is also to teach them "life-long skills they can do as they get older."

To motivate students and teach them about reaching goals, Lopez started a "mile club" for third-, fourth- and fifth-graders.

Once a week, students see how far they can run in 20 minutes and keep track of how many miles they've racked up with little tokens that look like feet.

"They do as many miles as they can — at least a mile — in 20 minutes," Lopez said

They get rewards as they reach certain levels, he said, such as passes to the local pool and T-shirts.

It seems to be working.

"I've noticed an increase in the total number of miles kids do," Lopez said. "Some run 80 miles in a school year."

Getting past the apathy

In dance class, instructor Katie Clark has students who are eager to perform, but others that she has to "crack down on."

"Some want to get stronger," she said. "But there's no drive for some."

Clark said she sits down and talks to students about why physical activity is important.

"They know they need to do it," she said.

P.E. teachers have to be creative in figuring out ways to get those apathetic students to work out, said DNHS Assistant Principal Jeff Napier.

Many of the kids who don't want to participate are the ones who need it the most, he said.

What freshman Tanner Walker likes about P.E. class is that it gets him "pumped" for his next class.

"I like being physically active," he said.

Walker is a wrestler and a soccer player. Beyond being in peak shape to play sports, he knows physical activity is good for his overall well-being.

"It's important to me to be healthy," he said. "I don't want to gain weight. I want to feel good about myself."

Beating the elements

It rains a lot in Del Norte, which means kids can be stuck inside for P.E. and recess.

"Half the winter, they have to be indoors," said Deborah Kravitz, the school district's program coordinator for Network for a Healthy California, a state initiative to promote eating fruits and vegetables and physical activity.

During a rainy day at some of the elementary schools, P.E. class and recess could be competing for space.

To make sure kids are still getting a little of recess and a break from their studies, the Network for a Healthy California staff provides teachers with resources for "instant recess" they can do in the classroom, Kravitz said.

To give kids a dose of physical activity, teachers can use DVDs of 10-minute activities designed to get the heart rate up, she explained.

The videos are of a football star, for example, leading the kids in an activity.

"They can do it right there at their desk," she said. "They don't need a lot of space."

Testing physical ability

California students are required to take a physical fitness test.

Students in fifth-, seventh- and ninth-grade, are tested in six fitness areas:

- Aerobic capacity (one-mile run)
- Abdominal strength and endurance (curl-ups)
- Upper body strength and endurance (push-ups)
- Body composition (BMI)
- Trunk extensor strength and flexibility (trunk lift)
- Flexibility (sit and reach).

P.E. is required in ninth grade, but if students can pass at least five of the six tests they're exempted from taking additional P.E. classes.

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