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FEATURED

Research shows that PE in schools can be life-changing

By Jessica Pollard East Oregonian Aug 27, 2019



Classified staff participate in a training aimed to integrate physical activity into the classroom during an

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UMATILLA COUNTY — School districts around the state are trying their best to keep up with increasing physical education requirements, even if it means playing around in the classroom.

The change is part of an incremental plan laid out by the state Legislature in 2007 designed to get Oregon students exercising more — 150 minutes a week for elementary students, and 225 minutes a week for middle school students — by the 2017 school year. When schools weren't able to keep up, another bill was passed, giving districts until the end of the 2020-2021 school year to meet the requirements.

Elementary schools are expected to start providing 120 of those minutes this year. That's where Angie Treadwell, SNAP-Ed coordinator for Oregon State University Extensions, comes in.

For the past few months, Treadwell and her team have been introducing educators at Hermiston, Umatilla, and Morrow County school districts to in-class kits with activities that meet the state physical education standards. She said that it's not always realistic for schools to hire another PE teacher in order to reach the requirements.

“This kind of thing has the ability to impact these kids for a lifetime,” Treadwell said.

The kits, dubbed Be Physically Active 2Day (BEPa 2.0), cost nearly \$100 and provides classroom-based physical activities designed for elementary schoolers of all ages.

Treadwell said donations from Lamb Weston helped OSU Extension provide the kits to different schools.

They provide teachers with everything they need to run physical education competitions to a hot-and-cold style game of tag that meets state physical education standards.

“They reinforce a lot of classroom concepts



Katherine Gunter, a professor of kinesiology and OSU Extension statewide physical activity specialist, designed the BEPA 2.0 kits and said that the link between physical activity and obesity prevention is pretty clear.

In 2016, Gunter was part of a research team that found in-school activity in rural Oregon schools was related to overall health of elementary students.

She said that in low-income areas — particularly rural places where transportation can be an issue — physical activity in schools can make a world of difference.

“We’ve got this pay-to-play culture, where it’s really hard if you’re a family that is struggling to make ends meet or having to make choices about where to invest. Paying for your child to be active can be a difficult decision to make,” Gunter said.

Gunter said that the state’s efforts to increase physical education in schools is well-intentioned, but not perfect.

“It’s a great best practice approach. Physical education is the best way for kids to have physical activity opportunity during school. But it came without a funding allocation adequate to hire enough PE teachers,” she said.

Creating the BEPA 2.0 kits is one solution, and even schools that might not be able to afford the full kits can purchase the curriculum book to help lead physical education activities in classrooms. Many of the activities, Gunter noted, don’t require equipment.

The Pendleton School District is taking another route to reach the state mandate. There, homeroom teachers are leading PE classes in the gym twice a week in addition to regular PE classes, according to Matt Yoshioka, curriculum director.

Yoshioka said the mandate has created an urban district where homeroom teachers lead PE, or risk increasing the number of PE teachers.

“(PE) is the only subject with the minimum number of teachers. What the state has done is take minutes away from different



Yoshioka is not alone in his thinking.

“The onus falls on the classroom teacher to somehow magically fit it in,” said Hermiston’s Sunset Elementary Principal Jerad Farley. “I completely understand the genesis of this mandate. All of this comes from a great place. Having said that, there’re a lot of other mandates.”

He said that Hermiston schools are currently working to strike a balance between health classes, PE classes and BEPA 2.0 activities in order to fill in the minutes.

Farley was principal at Rocky Heights Elementary last spring, where the BEPA 2.0 kits first made their district debut in kindergarten classes.

“You should have seen the smiles on their faces. It reinforced the idea that physical activity is engaging for kids, and can have a positive impact,” Farley said.

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Jessica Pollard

