



For Immediate Release

May 15, 2019

Contact:

Dr. Colleen Knauer 843-764-2212

Media Release

Physical Education Improving Test Scores and Behavior

Northwoods Middle School

Gerrita Postlewait, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Cynthia Ambrose
Deputy Superintendent of Learning
Services

Joseph Williams, Ed.D.
Executive Director of Middle School
Learning Community

Colleen Knauer, Ed.D.
Principal

North Charleston, SC - Exercise can improve brain function and thinking skills. It increases your heart rate, which boosts the flow of blood and oxygen to your brain. It can also stimulate the production of hormones that can enhance the growth of brain cells.

With that in mind, Physical Education teachers at Northwoods Middle School, Megan Reilly and Alex Matos, established a specialized class, called Advanced PE.

There are currently 21 sixth-grade students who participate. Each student is provided a uniform, a heart rate monitor, a specialized fitness watch, a water bottle, and a gym bag. They have a locker room and laundry facilities to ensure clean uniforms every day and a safe place to store their belongings without having to carry them back and forth.

Their watches are set to their height, weight, and gender. The students exercise their way through boot camp type stations, competing against each other and their own best times in the target heart rate zone and calories burned. Exercises include muscle-building, strength and endurance, and cardiovascular activities.

The results of the Advanced PE Class are astounding.

Reilly compared the student's scores from the fall to the spring, and 15 of the 21 students improved their scores in both English and math. Some students improved their grades exponentially while others improved an average of two to three points. Almost all students were above average in growth.

As if the improved grades were not enough, students improved drastically in their behavior as well. One female student had 19 behavioral incidents in the first two quarters and none in the third quarter.

One student went from 31 behavioral incidents in the first and second quarter to just nine in the third quarter.

"Those incidents could be minor because we log everything," said Reilly. "But that's quite an improvement."

Even more remarkable was that student's improvement academically. This particular student improved 10 points in math.

"I am proud of myself," he said. "I am working hard to make better grades."

Wellness is a school-wide initiative, and Principal Dr. Colleen Knauer was a big advocate for the creation of the Advanced PE class.

"The students in the Advanced PE program have soared to the challenge so much so that other students are wanting to enroll in the class," said Knauer. "As for the students currently enrolled, their behavior and grades are tracked and monitored daily by the PE teacher. Additionally, many of them have seen improvements not only with behavior and academics but also with their health."

Two students learned about the class and asked to be enrolled, not because they needed that extra push to improve their behavior or academic scores, but because of personal goals they wanted to accomplish in the areas of weight loss and wellness.

One of those students lost 7 lbs. in two weeks and has now lost 11 lbs. total. She's lifting weights, quickly turning fat into muscle. She can also run a mile in under 15 minutes.

"I feel so much better about myself," she said. "The hardest part about the class is to keep going when I want to give up. I push myself to keep going because this helps me. I plan to keep on working over the summer, as well."

An additional student has lost 17 lbs. so far.

"I really like the class and find everything to be real easy," he said. "My favorite part is lifting weights."

To further motivate these 21 students, teachers from their other classes often join them to get in their own workout. In addition, a morning PE class has been added for those students who need to start their day off with a little physical activity.

Coach Matos said that exercise works the same way in his own life.

"If I need to study or be more focused to do my daily routine, I exercise before I begin," said Matos. "We've seen this work so well for these kids that we've added a morning workout during the first-period homeroom. The kids can get some of that energy out before they roll out their day."

"A lot of their results are their choice," said Reilly. "There may be days they don't fully participate or are just having a bad day. From what we've learned that usually results in a behavioral incident or poor academic performance."

The students are held accountable by keeping a behavior tracker on hand for their teachers to fill out so that the coaches know their rate of improvement.

Reilly said none of the students have a negative attitude about being in the class. In fact, they're pushing themselves to do better.

"Typically a kid needs more than just someone who is going to call them out," said Reilly. "They need someone to be proud of them."

For more information about the Advanced PE class, contact Principal Collen Knauer at (843) 764-2212 or Charleston County School District's Office of Strategy and Communication at (843) 937-6303.

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is the second largest school system in South Carolina representing a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 86 schools and specialized programs. With approximately 6,100 employees district-wide, CCSD is the fourth largest employer in the region.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, charter, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), and Montessori schools, and is divided into three Learning Communities. Options include specialized programs in science, engineering and mathematics; liberal arts; music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military and other public service enterprises.