

# Cultivating a Healthy School Culture: Physical Activity Rewards for Staff and Students

Loma Vista Middle School – Riverside, CA | Alvord Unified School District

## WHY HEALTHY REWARDS FOR STAFF AND STUDENT WELLNESS?

Loma Vista Middle School has made great strides in promoting physical activity among students, staff, parents and community members. The school district established its wellness policy over 10 years ago, and the school's wellness committee is comprised of leaders who are actively engaged in school district and state policy efforts to foster healthy school environments. However, the school still faced challenges in encouraging healthy "non-food" rewards for student achievement, increasing participation in employee wellness programs and promoting healthy eating. The school set out to foster a culture of health by establishing physical activity rewards for staff and students.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

- 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- 1,110 students
- 75% of students qualify for free or reduced price meals

## ETHNICITY

- 86% Latino
- 9% White/Caucasian
- 2% Asian
- 2% Black/African-American
- 1% Multiracial/Other

## ACTION STEPS

With funds from a Kaiser Permanente Thriving Schools Action Plan Grant, the school's wellness committee spearheaded a multi-pronged approach to cultivate a school culture that supports and rewards healthy behaviors for both students and staff. First, the committee conducted an employee wellness survey to assess the needs of staff and identify new ways to encourage healthy habits among employees. Using input from the survey, new physical activity-focused employee wellness programs were organized, including walking clubs and dance classes. Staff were provided tools, such as pedometers and activity trackers, to help them integrate their health goals into their day-to-day schedules, and guest speakers presented at quarterly employee wellness talks (that parents were also invited to attend). To incorporate physical activity into students' everyday school routine, staff developed a new, activity-based reward program to honor student accomplishments. In place of food rewards like pizza parties, student achievements were recognized with fun, interactive activities. For example, during the first year of the program, students with perfect attendance were rewarded with a school-sponsored trip to a local trampoline park.

## CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

The student rewards and staff physical activity programs were met with great enthusiasm. The high level of interest and participation in the programs presented some initial capacity

and logistical challenges for staff. For example, bus transportation to the trampoline park involved complex logistics due to the higher than anticipated number of qualifying students. This challenge gave the school the chance to work in partnership with the trampoline park, and together they figured out how to keep additional trip costs within budget. Additionally, program coordinators adapted to the high demand of the employee walking challenge by expanding the length and number of challenges, and working with the child nutrition services department to fund additional rewards for participants. Although most teachers were supportive of non-food rewards, bringing on board the remaining teachers who preferred food rewards was a challenge; these teachers were persuaded after staff presentations that made the link between academic achievement, nutrition and physical activity.

### IMPACTS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since the programs began, there has been an overall shift in the school community's attitude towards health. Staff are now "100%" behind wellness efforts, and teachers have embraced the policy promoting activity-based rewards. Employee engagement in the various physical activity programs – walking clubs, dance classes and more – is up despite busy schedules. In fact, a number of teachers have purchased their own activity trackers as a result

of the physical activity challenge offered at the school.

*"If staff feel empowered, involved, informed and valued through your activities and the money you put into supporting them, they will be behind you all the way."*  
-Physical Education Teacher

### ADVICE FOR OTHER SCHOOLS

Support and buy-in from the school principal and staff, as well as linking student and staff wellness, were critical to the project's success in fostering a healthy school culture. Offering opportunities for participation and input from staff in the development of the project, as well as communicating the link between student learning and health, were instrumental in building staff commitment. Motivating staff was key because these efforts ultimately "trickled down to students" and helped bring students on board. Teachers carried their positive energy and enthusiasm about health into the classrooms by encouraging students to participate in activities and conducting "brain breaks" in between lessons.

### For More Information:

Kaiser Permanente Thriving Schools  
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The Thriving Schools Action Plan Grant Program is funded by Kaiser Permanente and implemented in partnership with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program. Action Plan Grants support schools to create healthy school environments for students and staff. This case study was developed based on the school's responses to the Action Plan Grants year-end survey.

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