

Scaling the Heights of Health: Climbing Wall Enriches Physical Activity Opportunities

E.W. Oliver Elementary – Riverdale, GA | Clayton County Public Schools



WHY PRIORITIZE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

At E.W. Oliver Elementary, staff and school leadership have long recognized health and wellness as critical to student academic success, and a comprehensive school wellness program guides students to develop life-long, healthy habits. Building upon the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recommendation that children engage in at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity, the E.W. Oliver wellness program emphasizes the importance of providing quality physical activity opportunities for every student – before, during, and after school. After securing funding for a full-time physical education (PE) teacher, the school was eager to expand their physical education programming and offer a broad range of enrichment experiences that could meet students' various interests and ability levels.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 1st to 5th grade
- 625 students
- 70% of students qualify for free or reduced price meals

ETHNICITY

- 89% Black/African-American
- 6% Latino
- 2% Asian
- 2% Multiracial/Other
- <1% Caucasian

ACTION STEPS

Staff at E.W. Oliver wanted to maximize the physical activity time available to students without the need for lots of additional equipment and set-up time. The solution: a rock climbing wall – an amenity found in many gyms, but not in many PE classes. With the support of a Kaiser Permanente Thriving Schools Action Plan Grant, the school was able to purchase and install a permanent, on-site climbing structure. The climbing wall offered a new activity that could be integrated into individual and team activities during physical education courses and afterschool programs; outside of PE, teachers in other departments, such as health education, could also build upon students' climbing wall sessions to complement their curriculum. Plans included incorporating math and social studies concepts into classroom lessons, for example, by asking students to calculate their total distance climbed over the semester and comparing it with some of the highest mountain peaks in the world.

CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

The main challenges to implementing the project were logistical. The project lead worked with school leadership to navigate the process of installing the wall – identifying an appropriate contractor, completing school district request forms, and securing approvals to finalize the installation. Understanding these logistical processes provided an opportunity to

build internal capacity for working with administrative policies and procedures.

IMPACTS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Students show tremendous excitement about the wall, and climbing activities have helped students learn important life skills: students have learned patience while waiting for their turn to use the rock wall, and gained group work skills while competing in intramural team rock climbing tournaments. The project lead estimates that 90% of students have climbed the wall to date, stating that the project has “helped tremendously” to engage students in PE classes and afterschool programs.

ADVICE FOR OTHER SCHOOLS

Critical to the success of the project was stakeholder buy-in to the school’s overall wellness mission and focus on enhancing physical activity at school. Raising staff

awareness of the crucial link between health, physical activity and academic achievement solidified commitment to improving PE classes, resulting in smooth project implementation. The climbing wall offered staff a tangible way to operationalize the school’s wellness goals.

Each day is an opportunity to facilitate academic achievement by upgrading physical activity practices. I encourage schools to increase healthy opportunities for the entire school community.
-Physical Education Teacher

For More Information:

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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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