

# A Hub for Health: Renovating a Fitness Center for Staff Wellness

Mt. Solo Middle School – Longview, WA | Longview School District

## WHY STAFF WELLNESS?

Located in a remote region along the Washington-Oregon border, Mt. Solo Middle School has long recognized not only its role as educator but also its role promoting school health. Given its rural location, many of its staff utilized the school's fitness center facilities and programming to engage in regular physical activity. However, much of the school's fitness equipment had long been in need of repair, and staff were interested in improving physical activity opportunities on campus. The school district's focus on staff wellness gave Mt. Solo the perfect opportunity to strengthen staff physical activity offerings not only for their school but also for staff from surrounding schools in the district.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

- 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- 487 students
- 47% of students qualify for free or reduced price meals

### ETHNICITY

- 1% Asian
- 1% American Indian/Alaska Native
- 1% Black/African-American
- 11% Latino
- 80% White/Caucasian
- 6% Multiracial/Other

## ACTION STEPS

Through a Kaiser Permanente Thriving Schools Action Plan Grant, the school worked to overhaul the staff fitness center and improve their staff wellness program. First, staff conducted an inventory of existing fitness equipment in need of repair, maintenance, or upgrades. They identified new equipment needed to expand physical activity options, including a treadmill, weight sets, and volleyball equipment. After existing equipment was repaired and new equipment purchased and installed, all staff members participated in safety trainings about proper use of the facilities.

Recognizing the limited resources and opportunities for physical activity in their rural community, Mt. Solo saw the potential for their new fitness center to serve more than just the nearly 50 staff and teachers at their school; the school worked with the district to keep the fitness center open for two hours after school hours, four days a week, to any staff member, including the other 350 teachers in the district. Mt. Solo worked to position staff as physical activity role models for students, encouraging staff to participate in "Road Loop," a monthly run where staff join students during their fitness class period to complete a half-mile running course.

## CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

Once the fitness center upgrade was completed, the school initially did not have the resources to hire a staff member to supervise

the fitness center after school hours. Working closely with district leadership, the school identified funding through the district's wellness program to support the staff position. Additionally, organizers faced initial challenges in getting staff to participate in the monthly "Road Loop" runs with students. Through consistent encouragement, more and more staff began to participate and run side-by-side with students.

### IMPACTS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

With new and up-to-date equipment, staff demand for the fitness center has never been higher, especially during after school hours. The project lead estimates that approximately 50% of Mt. Solo staff members now regularly use the facility. This has helped to create an overall healthier environment for staff, who are now fully committed to the school's health and wellness initiative, which in turn motivates students to see the importance of their own health. The "Road Loop" run has become, as described by organizers, "a very positive event in our school as the students were able to share a common ground with their teachers and an interest together in staying healthy." Over 80% of staff have participated in the opportunity over the past year.

### ADVICE FOR OTHER SCHOOLS

Gaining buy in from staff for the fitness center upgrade project early on was key to successfully implementing the effort. Providing the opportunity for physical activity was only the first step; it was complemented with efforts to create interest and excitement among staff about the importance of their own wellness, which was instrumental in increasing the number of staff running the "Road Loop" and using the new fitness center. The project further affirmed the important role of staff, as well as the impact of investing in staff wellness at the school and district levels, in creating a healthy environment for the school community and beyond.

*If you can find ways to get your staff on board with making healthy choices, then it will trickle down to the students. Staff are one of the students' biggest examples in school when it comes to making healthy choices. If the students see the staff wanting to make healthy choices, the students will follow.*

-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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