

# Repurposing Community Space for Walking and Wellness

Alvord Continuation High School – Riverside, CA | Alvord Unified School District

## WHY REPURPOSE UNUSED SCHOOL SPACE?

Alvord High School is fostering a healthy, safe school environment by transforming unused or underutilized school spaces. In 2015, the school successfully repurposed an unused classroom to create a staff fitness room equipped with a variety of exercise equipment. Students can also use the fitness room for physical education classes or for exercise during inclement weather. But due to the limited space, the room is not always able to accommodate students and staff at the same time. The school was interested in expanding opportunities for physical activity for both students and staff and saw great potential in a rarely used grassy field behind the school. The President's Council on Fitness has recognized "fit trail" systems as an innovative strategy for improving wellbeing and reducing sedentary lifestyle-related health issues. In this spirit, the school launched Project Get Fit to bring the "fit trail" model to the Alvord High community and provide a safe environment for students and staff to be active.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

- 10-12 grade
- 121 students
- 87% of students qualify for free or reduced price meals

### ETHNICITY

- 79.3% Latino
- 7.4% White
- 5.8% Black/African-American
- 2.5% Two or More Races
- 1.7% Asian
- 1.7% Filipino
- 1.7% American Indian or Alaska Native

## ACTION STEPS

Through the support of a Thriving Schools Action Plan Grant, the school set in motion a plan to create a small track – or "fit trail" – out of the underutilized field behind the school. The goal was to supplement existing physical activity programming by creating an inviting outdoor physical activity space for students and staff that the broader community could use outside of school hours.

The school district's facilities department worked to prepare and re-sod the field's soil to build a walkable dirt track, as well as install an irrigation system on the field. The track was fitted with 10 exercise stations, including equipment such as sit-up benches and chest-press bars, situated at regular intervals along the track. Instructional and directional signs were posted along the track to encourage activity and progress monitoring.

After installing the track and equipment, the planning team trained staff and students on how to use the equipment. The planning team actively promoted use of the fit trail before and after school to the broader school community through announcements in school newsletters and at school site council meetings and student government meetings. The school created a Fitness Club that both students and staff could join and offered elective and physical education credits to student members. With additional in-kind district support, the school plans to add a small soccer field and a gravel walking path to the field to complement the existing dirt track and fitness stations.

## CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

A challenge faced was delays in project installation. Although the school district was a key project partner and provided essential in-kind support, there was limited maintenance staff available due to competing district maintenance requests that

led to project delays. However, continued communications and follow-up with key district staff on work order requests were helpful in ensuring the appropriate steps were completed to install the track and equipment stations.

### IMPACTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since Project Get Fit launched, both students and teachers have been actively using and enjoying the health benefits of the fit trail. The track has been fully integrated in the school's physical education curriculum and programs, providing an engaging and accessible physical activity option for all. In addition to teachers and students, local community residents have used the equipment to exercise before and after school. The project lead noted that teachers have become healthier and less stressed since gaining access to the outdoor fit trail and fitness room.

The Thriving Schools Action Plan Grant and in-kind district support enabled the planning team to launch and build out the initial phase of the project, and the school has since leveraged other funds and additional in-kind support to maintain and expand the fit trail. This includes additional grant funding

from the Alvord Educational Foundation and Home Depot Foundation, as well as in-kind district facilities support for regular weekly maintenance and upkeep of the new track.

### ADVICE FOR OTHER SCHOOLS

Perseverance and persistence were key strategies in moving the project from idea to implementation. The project lead regularly communicated with key district personnel to ensure proper approvals and plans were in place to install the equipment. The planning team also secured other funding sources to fully actualize the project.

*"Never give up on writing a grant. Ask for help when needed. Do not stop at just one grant – there are many community entities willing to help a great cause."*

-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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