



Success Stories

INNOVATIVE AND INSPIRING SOLUTIONS THAT IMPROVE HEALTH AND WELLNESS IN SCHOOLS AROUND THE COUNTRY

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PE Teachers Speak Up for SPARK

KEARNEY SCHOOL DISTRICT | KEARNEY, NEBRASKA

Three years ago, the Alliance for a Healthier Generation entered an agreement with School Specialty, the parent company of SPARK to provide resources to create implementation sites in select schools. SPARK is a research-based curriculum and is designed to be more inclusive, active and fun than traditional physical education (PE) classes. SPARK has the distinction of being the first PE curriculum to work with the Alliance's Healthy Schools Program. Several research projects have shown that implementation of SPARK can increase academic achievement, moderate to vigorous physical activity in students, fitness achievement, sport skills development, enjoyment of PE and improved teacher instruction. Additionally, SPARK's effects are sustainable.

During the first year, SPARK provided training, curriculum and equipment to Healthy Schools Program members in Broward County, Florida, Orange Public Schools, New Jersey, Borrego Springs, California and Knox, Missouri. During the next two years, all elementary physical educators in Escambia County, Florida and Kearney Public Schools, Nebraska received the K-2 and 3-6 curriculum and trainings. The SPARK program helps schools meet numerous Healthy Schools Program criteria. National Physical Education and Physical Activity Manager Lisa Perry said, "The teaching strategies that the teachers learned has helped them create a more active environment in their physical education classes while teaching skills and delivering a standards based curriculum."

Here are some thoughts from three educators in Kearney, Nebraska:

Cari Franzen, Wellness and PEP Grant Coordinator

SPARK is an excellent program and curriculum that has enhanced and added a great dimension to our KPS physical education program. The SPARK strategies have increased the amount of moderate to vigorous

physical activity the students are getting in physical education classes. The KPS teachers have moved away from students standing in long lines waiting their turns, and now have enough equipment and activities so all students can participate. SPARK also includes strategies and ideas to adapt the games and activities to fit the needs of all students, regardless of their physical abilities.



The PE teachers have enjoyed the trainings, curriculum and equipment that come with the SPARK program. There is always great enthusiasm from the teachers after they have attended a SPARK workshop.

Two of our middle school teachers even ended up attending the SPARK Institute in San Diego because they enjoyed the trainings so much and wanted to learn more! SPARK is very user friendly, laid out very nicely and great for both new teachers and veteran teachers. It adds an extra "SPARK" to the physical education classroom/gymnasium. I highly recommend the SPARK program to anyone that is looking to enhance or give their physical education program a "positive and energetic makeover."

Lisa Donovan, Physical Education Teacher, Horizon Middle School

The SPARK training has changed the way I group the students for activities. Because of SPARK, I always have a "trick up my sleeve." I have seen many student groups cooperating together even when they are not with their best friends. The training has helped me find more ways to get ALL students involved, not just the best "athletes" in the class. The students who usually never get to touch the ball or be a part of a group are experiencing a hands on, cooperative physical education class. The SPARK materials have also helped me be more assertive when making the

objectives clear to the students. Stating the objectives right away relieves a lot of anxiety the students feel about trying a new game. I have changed the way we get class started. The students are active right from the beginning. The old tradition of running every day is gone. SPARK has given me many ways to incorporate heart-enhancing exercises disguised as fun activities. The SPARK training has influenced my notion that “drill sergeant” stretching and strength routines are out.

Middle school students are receptive to the SPARK activities. When I see students who were once not having success in physical education feel more confident about themselves during SPARK activities, I know that I am doing my job. SPARK helps to build interest in physical activity, even in students who did not previously see the fun in moving.

One of the aspects I admired the most was use of “grids” and smaller playing fields. This allows more students to be active at one time. The use of grids helps me utilize my space more efficiently and provide the students with more playing time. SPARK activities are simple in nature, and allow teachers to use progressions where they deem necessary. Rules of games can be adapted to fit the needs of the students and still meet the objectives. Lastly, SPARK activities do not require the use of endless equipment needs. Many of the activities can be accomplished with equipment already found in most gym storage rooms.

Dawn Westland, Physical Education Teacher, Riverdale Elementary School

Using SPARK has enhanced my teaching in many ways. Most importantly, it has helped me increase the amount of time my students are engaged in moderate to vigorous physical activity. The activities are very easy to follow and allow me to provide high-energy activities without the “competitive” aspect of traditional activities.



The way the SPARK curriculum is laid out allows me to quickly see the unit lessons and I love the flexibility of the curriculum- it allows me the freedom to take what I want to use from the SPARK binder and implement those activities with my own ideas. It is also a great asset when you are planning for a substitute teacher (nicely laid out and easy to follow.) The kids seem to really enjoy the activities that I’ve used. It’s nice to have fresh new ideas to keep the kids engaged in physical activity. The curriculum is also very consistent with the vocabulary used to instruct the K-5 children, which eliminates a lot of confusion.

Ideas for Keeping Your School Wellness Council Strong and Engaged

DELAWARE AND FLORIDA

Do you need some fresh ideas for bringing new people to your school wellness council table? Are you struggling to find a time when everyone can get together to meet? Read some tips from other schools!

“We needed a time to meet with our wellness council so that everyone could attend and provide feedback/input. We were having trouble finding that time so I spoke with our principal and she agreed to let the wellness council meet during “goal team” time. Typically this time is used for academics only- we have goal teams for math, science, etc. We had many goal teams established but no wellness team. Now we do! The wellness council can now involve teachers, parents and nutritional staff and meet at a regular time, once a month.”

- James Kucharzyk, Physical Education teacher
Lulu Ross Elementary School, Milford, DE

“A few of my schools have enlisted their tech coordinators to serve on their school wellness council (SWC) and I think it’s a great fit. Not only can the tech coordinator help the SWC members navigate the Alliance for a Healthier Generation’s website, Inventory and action plan, but they are one of those staff members who really are able to see the school from a big picture perspective. Their insight is valuable, and they’re a great member of the SWC team.”

-Amanda Gillespie, Florida Relationship Manager