

Building Healthy Habits

November 2012

Our Preschool is dedicated to providing healthy foods, exercise, and health education for our students and families. This is a national movement as well as a TUSD and Miles community priority. Therefore I am putting together a monthly newsletter relating to health. I am also open to receiving suggestions, articles, or feed back.

This month I will focus on exercise and the development of motor skills. For the past 12 years, I have been researching the correlation between physical activity and academic performance. Children prior to the age of six have developing brains that are forming pathways between neurons that become active with stimulation. When there is a lack of stimulation, neurons can shut down, permanently after age 6. When neurons don't fire, processing new information becomes challenging. When young children engage in physical activities involving any type and combination of motor movement, they are laying down neuronal pathways to better understand the world around them. Negotiating buttons, unscrewing lids, using writing utensils, riding trikes, climbing, crawling, bear walking, skipping these are all examples of important motor movements. Research indicates that students, who move through age-appropriate motor development stages, are better able to acquire math skills. Children who have physical limitations such, as Cerebral Palsy, often face challenges when acquiring math skills.

Young children naturally learn through physical interactions with their world. When researching early childhood programs around the world, I found the countries that engage students in fine and gross motor activities 1-2 hours daily have students who test higher in math and science than in other countries. In Japan, students have 2 half hour sessions of formal exercise daily and children begin formal writing and drawing classes at age 3. Having worked with children for 24 years now, and continuing to research this topic, I am more and more convinced that increasing physical experiences for young children students will better prepare them for the academic tasks they will encounter in the future especially in the area of mathematics. And girls are especially at risk for not being encouraged in physical activity that promotes a healthy body and mind. Why do statistics indicate that boys do better in math than girls? Something to think about.



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Through education grants and city funds, our Miles campus includes a city park with a variety of equipment for kids and adults to pursue activities that promote exercise. Climbing equipment, a rock wall, balancing equipment, a 1/4 mile paved track and fitness stations adorn our big playground. On our preschool playground, we provide many opportunities to strengthen motor skills throughout our day through climbing, running, ball activities, riding trikes, digging, jumping, tumbling, hopping, obstacle courses, etc. Students also participate in a structured 45 minute PE class every week with Maria, our school PE teacher, who provides games, activities, stretching, and instruction on how to use a variety of materials like scooter boards, Frisbees, soccer balls, bowling, etc. And it is always a delight to hear students ask to take out the tumbling mat, go run a lap, play duck, duck, goose, or play on the big kid's play ground.

Our preschool has invested in many fine motor manipulatives where students use their fingers, hands, and hand-eye coordination to build, paint, write, draw, create designs, follow patterns, use play dough, manipulate magnetic or block toys, or Geo boards. With math manipulatives and materials from our Hand Writing Without Tears Program, students also gain math and literacy skills in the process.

Our goal is to help students get the exercise they need, the practice with motor building skills necessary for development, and to build lifelong skills that promote health.



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