

Lincoln's Fitness Challenge

*Lincoln Elementary School
Wausau, Wisconsin*

Students at Lincoln Elementary School walked, biked, and swam their way toward a healthier lifestyle during Lincoln's Fitness Challenge, actually a year-long series of events designed to teach the importance and the benefits of physical activity.

The practice is a spin-off of a fitness program run by the Wisconsin Governor's Office. Having met the state's challenge two years ago, Lincoln decided to do its own version of the same program. This ties in with one of the district's goals: to promote and support a culture of wellness throughout the school community. It also promoted family time, when children and parents would share activities, such as biking or hiking or a game of tag.

The program includes three six-week challenges: for fall, winter, and spring. The goal is to have children get 60 minutes of activity per day, five days a week. The youngsters can do any kind of physical activity. The adults are encouraged to do 30 minutes of activity, five days a week. Everyone keeps an activity log, which the school provides.

Younger participants colored a chart in their activity log with different colors denoting different activities. Older participants wrote down activities and times. They all handed in their logs weekly to qualify for a prize drawing. Students who met the fitness goal every week of the program were entered into a grand prize drawing. Small prizes were awarded weekly to keep students' motivated and moving.

At the end of each six-week challenge, school administrators hosted an assembly to announce the grand prize winners. The prizes, most of which were donated, included a bicycle, sports equipment, or gift cards. All other participants got a free one-day pass for the entire family to the local YMCA.

Each challenge had a theme, usually tied to a Wisconsin sports team. The spring challenge, for instance, focused on baseball and the Milwaukee Brewers. A special event of the

spring challenge had to do with sausage. The parent partnership coordinator managed to borrow a sausage costume that was eight feet long. School staff, parents and students filled the "sausage" and then raced. "All kinds of teachers wanted to take part as one of the racing sausages," said the coordinator.

There was plenty of enthusiasm for the Fitness Challenge. About 150 students, 30 parents, and more than 20 school staff members participated during the year.

"I feel guilty if I don't get my exercise in on five days each week," one staff member said.

"This got me moving and I love the time I spend with my kids. We make it part of our day, and we look forward to it," a parent reported.

The school spent \$100 to \$300 for prizes for each challenge. These expenses were covered by a county health grant.

School administrators plan to repeat the program in the future. They are looking to develop the next challenge around the Green Bay Packers football team.

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