

Adams In Motion Running and Walking at Adams Elementary Corvallis, Oregon

Motivation

Parents across the country are increasingly concerned with their children's health. Stories abound in the media, from the *Parade* insert in the Sunday newspaper to *The Economist*: American kids are not active enough; there is an epidemic of obesity among America's youth; the food marketed to kids is insufficiently nutritious while portions are excessively voluminous. Even the childless among us are concerned about the social impacts, including the early onset of disease and the anticipated burden on our health care system as these kids move to adulthood.

The Wellness Committee in the Corvallis School District has been working to motivate students to make better decisions about what they eat, and to offer more opportunity for physical activity during school hours.

Many 509J schools have organized a local wellness committee to help implement the recommendations of the District-wide group. The Adams In Motion (AIM) program grew from the efforts of the Adams School committee to provide opportunities beyond PE for students to engage in fitness-oriented physical activity. In the inaugural year, AIM has been embraced by all involved.

Program Description

Adams In Motion is a running and walking program for elementary school students. Three days a week – Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays – all students have the option to run or walk laps at morning recess. The kids cover a 1/5 mile course. Each student has a laminated card that is punched as they complete each lap. Each set of five punches indicates a mile travelled, and each card tallies 10 miles. The cards are color coded: the first 10 miles are recorded on a yellow card, an orange captures miles 11 through 20, blue shows the student is working on miles 21 through 30, and so on.

Each student who completes 10 miles receives an award – thanks to a generous donation this year, the award is a small flashlight on a lace cord. There is a yellow bead on the cord. For each subsequent card completed the student receives an additional bead (the same color as the card completed) to put on the cord. The student also can wear a finisher's medal for the remainder of that day. When 50 miles is completed, the student is awarded a medal to keep.

As originally conceived, the program was to run through the end of October or mid-November, depending on the weather. AIM proved so popular with students, faculty, volunteers and parents that all involved agreed to try to continue the program through the winter. So far, any time there has been outdoor recess, AIM has been offered. And the kids participate even in inclement weather!

Program Administration

Parent volunteers are the backbone of Adams in Motion. Many parents enjoy the opportunity to watch and encourage their own kids by punching lap cards. Others support the behind-the-scenes tasks that keep the program going. At Adams, we are fortunate to have several volunteers from the general community in addition to Adams parents.

Communication with the school faculty and administrative staff is vital to the program. Engaging a faculty member to champion the program with the rest of the teachers, as well as act as a liaison between the volunteers and the school faculty and staff, is important.

There are several behind-the-scenes volunteer opportunities as well. Duties include creating and maintaining the stock of laminated lap-counting cards, procuring and organizing awards, defining the running path, organizing volunteers, recording and tallying miles run by each student, class and grade, and organizing periodic special events.

These duties will be detailed below. Some of these tasks are not time-intensive, and some volunteers take on multiple positions.

Daily Volunteers

The primary daily activity is punching lap cards. The students participating in AIM range from small, shy kindergarteners to quickly-maturing, bold 11-year olds. To encourage participation, it is important that the kids feel safe and comfortable all along the course. In an effort to group students among their peers, as well as to avoid bottlenecks at the card-punching stations, three punching stations are distributed around the course. Kindergarteners and first graders have their cards punched at one station, 2nd and 3rd grade at a second, and 4th and 5th at the third. The stations are positioned on the course with consideration of how far the kids travel to get to the course, the distance they must cover to return to class. This way, we minimize punches awarded for running a partial lap.

Each day, one volunteer takes responsibility to gather the materials needed (boxes containing hole punches, blank cards and pens, pony beads, medals, course markers etc.) and brings them to the start of the course. (This is usually done with the help of others.) These volunteers also ensure the course is adequately marked for the runners and walkers. This preparation takes only 5-10 minutes.

Each punching station is staffed by at least one, and preferably two volunteers. A single person creates new cards and distributes awards as the students complete a 10-mile card.

As a result, there are four to seven volunteers on the course each day.

Faculty Liaison

This teacher is the communication link between the AIM program volunteers and the school faculty and staff. It's important to recruit someone who strongly supports the running and walking program, and ideally who is an athlete herself. This person contacts the teachers and

administration on behalf of the volunteer committee. Topics include soliciting input about the conduct of the program, as well as communicating information about course changes, etc.

The faculty liaison provides the “teacher point of view” on all areas of the program. This includes organizing the lap counting cards, course designation, and planning special events.

Strong faculty and staff support is critical to the success of the program. Because each student has a punch card, teachers must be willing to devise a method of storing and distributing the cards to the students, as well as periodically making the cards available to program volunteers for recordkeeping. In the winter, having kids running on the grass increases the amount of debris tracked into the classrooms and through the school. It’s important to include the campus steward in discussions of the program, and to consider her concerns.

Office staff may field calls from parents and volunteers.

Recordkeeping

Keeping track of the number of miles covered by the students serves at least two purposes. The kids have a sense of accomplishment when they see how far they’ve run or walked, both individually and as a group. They cheer each other on, and some adopt an “I can do that too!” attitude.

Equally important, we believe that gathering this data over time, and integrating it with other measurements made by the school (including height/weight metrics, test scores, behavior problems) might provide concrete evidence of the benefits of physical activity in elementary school.

Adams In Motion currently records achievement in three ways. Each day, a volunteer (in our case, the faculty liaison) gathers the names of the students who completed a 10-mile card. The student’s name is posted in a prominent place in the school. There is an area for each 10-mile achievement.

Each week, a volunteer tallies the number of 10-mile cards completed by each student and enters that into an excel spreadsheet. We hope to do some reporting off this data soon.

Finally, each month, volunteers do a physical audit of cards punched, by classroom. These totals are reflected on a map of the United States, showing how far different groups have run.

Clearly, there are many ways this data can be used: to recognize kids for their achievements, to encourage them to participate, and most importantly, to track the impact of the program on student health and classroom performance. We would welcome the opportunity to work with a research project to gain insight into the benefits of the program.

Card Creation and Award Maintenance

This volunteer creates the punch cards of various colors, and ensures there are enough cards, awards and pony beads to present to kids expected to complete 10-mile cards. She also purchases (and is reimbursed for) the paper and other supplies needed.

This position requires the most effort at the beginning of the school year, and the volunteer will likely need support. Before the start of the school year, a card is created for each student, indicating the student's name, grade and teacher. (We received a set of labels containing this information from the office staff.) It takes several hours to photocopy, laminate, cut and label over 400 cards.

Additional 10-mile cards, in colors indicating the total number of miles completed, can be created as needed throughout the year.

This year, thanks to a generous donation from Samaritan Health Services, AIM was able to award a small flashlight to each student who completed 10 miles. The flashlight is connected to a length of Rexlace, along with a pony bead. Students receive a bead, corresponding to the card color, after completing each subsequent 10-mile card (i.e., 20 miles, 30 miles...). They can collect the beads on the Rexlace cord holding the flashlight.

Additionally, thanks to donations from the local running community, the kids select a race finishing medal to wear for the day.

The Card Creation/Award volunteer also creates the 10-mile awards, and keeps track of the medals. Again, especially at the beginning of the year, it may be necessary to solicit help assembling the initial stock of awards.

Fundraising

Adams in Motion is a very cost-effective program. No district funds have been used, although principal Patty Pearson generously supports the program through the school's discretionary funds by providing photocopying and laminating facilities. That said, the program is not free, and has been supported through both cash and in-kind donations from local businesses including a generous grant from the Adams Parent and Teachers Organization (APT), Samaritan Health Services, Five Star Sports, R3 Engraving, Costco, parents of current Adams students and alumni.

Continued success of the program will require fundraising. This is a great volunteer opportunity for a parent who supports the program, but is unable to assist in its daily execution.

Volunteer Coordinator

The Volunteer Coordinator keeps track of tasks that need to be accomplished, and ensures a volunteer is attached to each. The Coordinator also serves as the point of contact for new volunteers, as well as for general questions about the program. She also emails the weekly schedule to the volunteers.

This position may be best filled by someone who has previously volunteered in the program, and is able to be actively involved.

Extras

Adams in Motion has experimented with some bonus activities. One of our volunteers actively invited guest runners to participate in the program. The kids (especially the younger ones) love

this! Guests in the fall term include: Mayor Charlie Tomlinson, members of the OSU soccer team, golf team, and crew, members of the Corvallis Fire Department and Sparky the Fire Dog.

The AIM volunteers also staged a fun run, the Adams Autumn Amble, in November. We devised a 2008 meter course (about 1.25 miles). Each student wore a race bib, and we had a start/finish line. The kids received a laminated certificate, a fruit leather and water after they crossed the finish line. The Amble began at 2pm on a Friday, and *every student at Adams completed the course!*

Both of these “extras” were facilitated by volunteers participating in other program activities.

Future Development

Adams in Motion can be customized to fit the needs and character of different schools. (The program name is the obvious change each school would make.) Program frequency, methods for motivating and rewarding students, volunteer recruitment and fundraising can be implemented in many ways.

If the program is to be adopted as a permanent offering, it will be desirable (and perhaps even necessary) to identify a permanent path on school grounds on which the kids will run and walk. This path should be usable throughout the school year, and would reduce the amount of debris tracked in during the winter months.

The Adams volunteers have investigated installing a wood-chip path on school grounds. We feel a path could be built using volunteer labor, and a combination of donated and purchased raw materials. The cost would be modest, and we are confident we can raise the money to make this a reality. An added benefit is that the path would be available to the surrounding community for exercise when school is not in session. Periodically grooming the path could become a project undertaken by some classes, by a school club, or a scout troop or other organization.

That said, we have not identified a sustainable solution for maintaining the path. The School District maintenance department feels that such a path could become a burden to maintain should volunteer support wane in the future. Further, the maintenance department expressed concern that the grounds crews would have difficulty mowing along the perimeter of such a path. We are seeking information and advice from other agencies that maintain such paths, in the hope of showing that the small additional cost incurred in maintaining a wood-chip path is far outweighed by the benefits a path would deliver.

Summary

School funding is declining. Childhood obesity is increasing. Health-care costs are rising even as the general health of the U.S. population declines. Significantly changing these national trends is beyond the control of the individual, and even most communities. But like many society-wide

challenges, the work can begin locally. Individuals can come together and change the course of these larger social issues in their own neighborhoods.

Adams in Motion is a community-supported, inexpensive program that was designed to offer an opportunity for elementary-school kids to have an additional source of structured physical activity during the school day. Yet the effects of AIM are even broader.

Studies show that exercise helps kids stay focused in the classroom, and sleep better at night. Kids who are rested and focused perform better academically, and this makes our schools more effective.

Programs like Adams in Motion teach kids, from a young age, that physical activity is fun and makes them feel good. These children will develop healthy exercise habits. Coupled with efforts to discourage junk food at schools, these students will develop into healthy adults. In the long term, health-care costs will come down. AIM can't reverse the downward trend of public school funding. But it just might make the current funds go a bit farther by helping develop a healthier student body.

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