

Operation Tone Up: Improving Academic and Fitness Test Scores



Operation Tone Up is an evidence-based in-school program that can dramatically improve academics, health, and attendance. The Operation Tone Up program commenced January-April (2014). Program materials included a CD, DVD, and enough workbooks for each student. There are two components to the program: physical activity and nutrition. The physical activity portion spans 3 days per week, with the children getting an additional 20 minutes of physical activity on each day. The nutrition component is offered each school day for 10 weeks.

The program does not supplant Physical Education, and does not count towards PE minutes. However, there is some additional physical activity that the students engage in. The music that accompanies the physical activity component has nutrition facts built in. The students are reviewing nutrition facts while they are being physically active. Teachers, parents, and principals were included in videos that touted the benefits of the program, and the positive impact it made on the lives of the students. Alliance for a Healthier Generation was an organization that joined forces with the district. One school received Gold status in the Healthy Schools Program challenge for their exemplary work in school health.

Previous to Operation Tone Up students struggled to meet the requirements to do well in fourth grade. Academic test scores were low and fell below standards when children entered fourth grade. Adding additional physical activity has increased or maintained scores even when the curriculum or testing changed. Not only did academic scores improve, fitness testing scores also improved.

Parent Engagement

Parents have been engaged with the program through the online home version as well as helping their child track their nutrient and water intake daily over each of the 10 weeks. Parents stated that they have been spurred on by their children, to reduce the purchase of unhealthy foods. As their children learn through the program, how to read food labels and how the nutrients in food works to support them, they become so engaged in applying what they have learned that they seek to share these resources with their friends and families. Both parents and other family members (including some of the teachers) say they have changed their personal practices because of seeing the positive effects on the children.

Community Engagement

Operation Tone Up is being used in the 4th and 5th grades at each of the district's 14 schools. At the end of the 10 weeks, each school has a site based competition (20 minutes of nonstop aerobic activity with students scored on endurance, proper form and transitions and answering nutrition based questions) to find the fittest 4th and 5th graders at the site. The 10 students selected from 4th and 5th grade to attend the District's Fittest School Challenge. Here the 10 students from each site compete as a team to identify the Fittest School in the District.

Parents and community members attend to cheer on their respective sites. The winning school from the district competition then moves on to the Inter-district competition against other San Gabriel Valley districts, to identify the Fittest District. The winning district will then go on to compete against the Fittest District from Arizona.

El Monte City School District has won the inter-district three times and inter-state competition twice in the last three years. Advancing in the competition helped to gain the attention of the entire San Gabriel Valley. This healthy competition brings the community together and increases the awareness around the importance of physical activity, nutrition, and the connection to academics.

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