

Student Wellness Advocacy Team Creates Campus Culture of Health and Wellness at Sandra Day O'Connor High School in Phoenix

Phoenix, AZ | Success Story

February 28, 2018



Homework, grades, standardized tests, college applications...it isn't surprising that stress can run rampant in any high school community. Chronic stress can lead to unhealthy habits that contribute to obesity - even anxiety and depression. A survey by the American Psychological Association found that nearly half of all teens (45%) said they were stressed by school. Stress is something that must be addressed - and Sandra Day O'Connor High School (SDOHS) is doing just that.

SDOHS leadership understands the power of physical activity and healthy living. The school is enrolled in the national Active Schools movement (activeschoolsus.org) and conducts a Student Wellness Advocacy Team (S.W.A.T.) initiative.

Principal Dr. Lynn Miller proudly says, “S.W.A.T. has shifted the culture of our campus to become more healthy and active. This has positively impacted our students’ health and learning. I am excited to see our students flourish in this culture.”

S.W.A.T. is organized to address four health behaviors: movement driven learning, physical activity, nutrition, and stress management. Under the leadership of the school’s sports medicine, health and physical education programs, approximately, 600 students (25%) and 40 faculty members (33%) are participating on 30 S.W.A.T teams. Each team oversees a different health and wellness focus.

Movement driven learning is a concept that integrates physical activity and health into classrooms and subject areas. SDOHS uses a program from Core Purpose Consulting’s book, *Recess Was My Favorite Subject, Where Did It Go*, called “Minutes Out of Your Seat” because by adding movement to learning, students become more engaged.

To encourage and support increased physical activity, the school redesigned their Tuesday and Thursday lunch periods, now known as Eagle Hour. After eating, students are invited to participate in activities such as intramural sports, yoga, Tai Chi, stretch therapy, meal prep, nutrition, meditation, volleyball, spike ball, ping pong, and more. Currently about 65% of students choose to participate, and the number continues to grow as a result of student enjoyment and marketing strategies.

SDOHS’s school newspaper, *The Talon*, provided quotes from students:

Sophomore Levi Meyer said, “It’s awesome! I love what the school is doing with Eagle Hour and intramurals.”

Junior Maurice Archbold stated, “It’s helping me to enjoy school a little bit more. It gives me something to look forward to - actually kind of a motivation for my grades.”

S.W.A.T. is committed to movement for faculty too. SDOHS was awarded the Maricopa County Health Department Gold Medal Award and asked to be the model high school for Arizona for the Healthy Arizona Worksite Program. S.W.A.T’s next campaign, “Bikes for Teachers,” encourages teachers to ride bikes between classes to pick up copies and squeeze in a physical activity break during their prep period.

As part of the big picture of health and wellness, S.W.A.T. also prioritizes stress management and nutrition. For example, S.W.A.T is working with an art teacher to deliver an art therapy program, a form of stress management that uses artistic creative processes to improve one’s mental wellness.

A recent addition to the school environment is a light or dark meditation room filled with yoga mats, aromatherapy, sound therapy, and de-stressing images such as waterfalls on TVs for teachers and students to use throughout the day. The room was funded by a \$1,000 award S.W.A.T. received from Active Schools

partner, GENYOUth, through their innovative AdVenture Capital (AdCap) program that inspires, empowers and motivates creative, curious and brave student entrepreneurs to use their big ideas to make changes in school and community health and wellness.

On the nutrition front, SDOHS has achieved the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Healthier U.S. School Challenge Bronze Award and is working on enhancements to achieve the Gold Award. S.W.A.T. nutrition teams have brought in community nutrition organizations to support student-led agendas such as athlete meal prep program, monthly nutrition classes, and initiatives that promote healthier meal options in the cafeteria.

“Offering these types of activities throughout the day helps students gain a better physical and mental state, which translates to their academic performance,” says health and physical education teacher Dr. Shane Hesse, “And it gives them a sense of life on a college campus.”

What's next for S.W.A.T.? The sky's the limit. They will continue to be driven by their goal to provide meaningful and enjoyable health and wellness programs for students, staff and community members.

SDOHS' S.W.A.T. creator and #1 wellness champion, Hesse, is thrilled that “Students and teachers come to campus excited for the day - that's what we're here for!”

Created in 2013, Active Schools is a national movement to ensure that 60 minutes a day of physical education and before, during, and after school physical activity is the norm in K-12 schools throughout the United States. It is powered by an unprecedented collaborative of public and private organizations, currently 90, who believe that meaningful, sustainable, large-scale social change is best accomplished when organizations and individuals work together. To learn more about Active Schools and join the movement, visit www.activeschoolsus.org.

[← Back to Stories](#)



Next Story

Active Schools Releases A Guide for Engaging Parents in School Physical Education and Physical Activity: Resources and Examples





[About](#)

[Get Involved](#)

[Get Discounts](#)

[Web Badge](#)

[Contact Us](#)

info@activeschoolsUS.org



Playground artwork credit: Designs © Peaceful Playgrounds, Inc.