

T.E.A.M.20—Increasing Physical Activity, Reducing Student Conflict, and Expanding Student Friendships at Prairie View

Last spring, Prairie View staff engaged in conversations on several topics: 1) Increasing student daily aerobic activity to improve cognitive performance and alertness in the afternoon; 2) Decreasing the amount of conflict that follows students into the classroom from recess and lunch, distracting students from giving their full attention in the afternoon. Out of these conversations, the program Together Everyone is Active and Moving for 20 minutes (TEAM20) evolved. With some creative scheduling and flexibility from teachers, we were able to free up three inside spaces during the normal recess time of 2nd through 5th graders. These spaces were important to have so that we could run TEAM20 regardless of the weather out on our windy and cold prairie.

Secondly, Lisa Caskey (music teacher), Luke Miller (P.E. teacher) and Kristen O'Dell (art teacher) all agreed to rearrange their schedules and duties so that they could lead each grade level (2-5) in daily 20 minute aerobic activity. We established criteria for the TEAM20 activities: they must either be aerobic or focused on increasing strength and flexibility; they should promote cooperation not competition; they should require all students to participate for the entire 20 minutes (no waiting in line for a turn at kick ball); and they should vary from day to day and week to week. The three teachers have come up with a great variety of activities including everything from yoga, non-weight muscle strengthening, calisthenics, dance, exercise videos, total participation team sports, and team-building games, to mention just a few. Each teacher now takes one-third of each grade level at a time every day. The grade-level groups rotate among the 3 teachers week by week and the groups get re-formed every six weeks. Teachers allow students to give input on who is with them in their groups to ensure that friendships can be honored.

The results so far have exceeded our expectations. In an informal survey, 80% of the students preferred TEAM20 over traditional recess. Parents at our PTO meetings have shared that often the only thing their students share about their day in the evenings is the TEAM20 activity. Students have shared that being matched up with different classmates to do cooperative games has increased the number of friends they have. Our shy students have shared how much they appreciate not having to watch on the sidelines during recess time. The amount of student conflict that is brought in to the cafeteria and later to the classroom has almost disappeared. We now can allow students in grades 2-5 to choose their seating in the cafeteria and have not had relatively few issues of misbehavior compared to previous years. We allow our students in grades 2-5 to begin returning to the classroom with 10 minutes to go in their lunch period—and have found this beneficial in thinning out the students (and often accompanied behavior problems) by allowing students to read or play table games for a few minutes before starting instruction.

Teachers comment that between the TEAM20 program and the scaffold dismissal from the cafeteria, they find students relaxed and more ready to work in the afternoons. To date, we are feeling very positive about our TEAM20 initiative and have begun to talk about ways to create a hybrid version of the program for grades K-1.