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Washington Post

Students at Orr Elementary in Washington, D.C., take part in the Build Our Kids Success program, a voluntary before-school exercise program.

Published: May 21, 2012 3:00 a.m.

Schools add early-morning exercise program to get students moving

Vicky Hallett | Washington Post

When Washington Redskins tight end Chris Cooley swung by Orr Elementary School in Washington, D.C., recently, he explained to the 100 kids circled around him that he'd already exercised that day. "So hopefully I can keep up with you," he said.

Fat chance of that. A few minutes later, he rotated through stations dedicated to burpees, jumping jacks, lunges, squats and fast-foot drills, and then participating in a round of toilet tag (when you're caught, you have to freeze in a squat with a hand up, hoping that someone will "flush" you to put you back in the game), Cooley's jacket was off and he was standing on the sidelines watching the group do the "Wobble" line dance. "I was sweating," he said. "This is definitely a great workout for anyone."

It's particularly a great workout for kids, which is the idea behind BOKS (Build Our Kids' Success), a program launched in seven D.C. public schools this year.

Founder and executive director Kathleen Tullie, who also visited Orr that day, was a corporate-finance-executive-turned-stay-at-home mom in Natick, Mass., when she read the book "Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain," by psychiatrist John Ratey. Recognizing that activity spurs brain-cell growth, improves mood and boosts memory, she persuaded her school's

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Group predicts 39 states over 50% obese in 2030

We Americans already know how fat we are. Can it get much worse? Apparently, yes, according to an advocacy group that predicts that by 2030 more than half the people in the vast majority of states will be obese. *Wednesday*

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STOCKHOLM – Two Swedish women are hoping to get pregnant after undergoing what doctors are calling the world's first mother-to-daughter uterus transplants. *Tuesday*

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superintendent to allow her to create a 45-minute before-school exercise program that kicked off in October 2009.

"Word-of-mom started," Tullie says, and the program was soon adopted by the Reebok Foundation, which has helped promote and fund the expansion of BOKS in Boston and beyond. Starting in the fall, that has included the District of Columbia, which encouraged the program to specifically target kids in Ward 8, who have the highest rates of obesity in the city.

The Reebok Foundation is covering all costs for the five schools in Ward 8 that have launched the program, although Ewunike Akpan, BOKS's D.C.-area coordinator, notes it doesn't cost much to pay trainers (at least one for every 20 kids) and buy basic equipment (such as cones and jump ropes). Any school interested in participating can receive free organizational materials and lesson plans, which include an emphasis on a skill of the week (such as push-ups and squats) as well as games and a "BOKS Bit," a cool-down that's combined with nutrition advice.

At Orr, where students have physical education just one or two times a week, depending on grade level, Principal Michelle Edwards was eager to get moving with BOKS. "It's an opportunity to get healthy in the morning," says Edwards, who has seen vast behavioral improvements since implementing the program in January.

It hasn't just benefited the students; it's helped staff and parents looking to get exercise, too. They're welcome to assist lead trainer Dewayne Curry, or join the adult Zumba class that spun off from the BOKS program.

Most of the BOKS programs in D.C. have an average of 50 students, but Orr has more than 100 – more than a third of its student body. And rather than do it just two or three times a week, which is the typical schedule, Orr has opted to keep it going Monday through Friday. Both of those decisions have helped it quickly become a part of school culture.

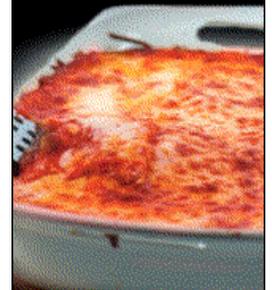
Antione Redman, 9, is such a fan that he pitches in by setting up the equipment every morning. "I've been losing weight, and my mom likes it because she wants me to lose weight," says Antione, who regularly does burpees and planks away from school now. So does Kym Danny, 7: "I do some jumping jacks at home, and burpees, and I go to bed because I'm so tired."

Those are words all parents want to hear.

"So why not do this at every school?" Tullie asks. With 84 schools on board, and with a goal of 300 by the fall, that dream sounds a lot like a plan.



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