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School fitness idea goes global

June 09, 2011 | By Megan McKee, Globe Correspondent

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“Our reaction was immediate: ‘How do we do it? How fast can we do it?’” said Joe Shea, Boston’s academic superintendent for elementary schools, of his reaction when he was approached about the program.

Tullie said the success of BOKS is its simplicity and accessibility. Any person wishing to bring the program to an elementary school can contact the organization to request funding for a trainer and equipment, or download the curriculum for free and work out funding and volunteers independently.

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A typical 45-minute session, held two or three times a week, begins with socializing and shifts to stretching and warm-up activities. The students then do high-energy exercises like jogging laps before moving to less-intense activities like obstacle courses. Sessions end with a cool-down period and talks about nutrition and health-related issues.

At Dorchester’s Mather Elementary, one of the school’s custodians, Keith “Coach Mac” Mcnair, is the lead trainer for BOKS.

“The program was phenomenal because I’ve never had a bunch of kids in a big group like that having fun and getting fit at the same time,” he said. “These kids, they wanted to run around and exercise.”

For the past three years, Mcnair has run a club at the Mather school for 10 at-risk youths, meeting with them for two hours every day after school with the goal of getting them on the right track.

This year, with BOKS, he was able to reach an additional 135 students, he said.

Tullie said the only real difference the organization has encountered in Boston schools is the lack of parental volunteers.

“The beauty of the program is that it is very adaptable to any need,” said Tullie. “I don’t feel like we’re done yet. I feel like there will be more evolutions.”

Megan McKee can be reached at megan.mckee@gmail.com.

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