

Advertisement:



Grayslake

# Walking is a part of the Monday morning routine at Grayslake Middle School



By Andrea L. Brown Special to the Tribune Oct. 18, 2011 at 5:07 p.m.



Chris Ramotar (left), Ryan Jackowski (right) (Andrea L. Brown / Special to the Tribune)

On weekends Allie O'Connell, 13, loves to sleep until 10 a.m. Come Monday, she admits she is still groggy when school starts at 8:35 a.m.

That's why the Grayslake Middle School student enjoys starting her week walking with her classmates though the school halls. The weekly ritual at the middle school is based on a theory that links movement to improved brain activity.

"The music can help wake you up," O'Connell said. "I feel like I can think better because I'm not half asleep during first hour."

Physical education teachers participating on a school task force came up with the idea, patterned after theories in the book "Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercises and the Brain," by

John J. Ratey.

“Research shows increases in movement and exercise stimulate the brain,” said Assistant Principal Karen Wiesner.

The weekly walk takes about 10 minutes between homeroom and the first full morning class period.

Sean Dameron, 13, thinks he concentrates better when he returns to the classroom after walking with his friends.

“I find it is a way to get the energy out in the morning,” Dameron said.

Walking was first incorporated into the school day last spring during a two-week period when the Illinois Standards Achievement Test was administered. Unstructured exercise was one of a number of methods the school used to help kids perform well on the standardized tests.

Wiesner said it is especially difficult to motivate students to focus on tests they know will have no bearing on their grades.

After the testing period was over, several students and teachers asked when they might start walking again. That convinced administrators to work walking into the Monday morning schedule.

“We want to make sure we’re trying to engage the kids,” Wiesner said. “It’s a way to connect the kids, too.”

The walks are also a way for the students to connect with each other. Social interaction and relationships are an important part of the middle school culture, Wiesner said.

O’Connell said she uses the time to catch up with her friends.

“Because it’s on a Monday, you can talk to your friends about the weekend,” she said.

Grayslake Middle School Principal Marcus Smith said there will not be any attempt to draw a scientific conclusion to determine if the program has had a positive effect. But he knows the Monday morning walks are good for morale.

“The kids enjoy it. The teachers enjoy it,” Smith said. “Middle school kids are not always the easiest to motivate.”