

National Early Care and Education Learning Collaboratives Project

Water Success Story from Los Angeles, California



St. Anthony's Preschool San Gabriel, CA

Joanne Cendejas, Director

Nicole Cendejas, Lead Teacher and Leadership Team Lead

St. Anthony's Preschool staff was concerned with the amount of juice and sugar-sweetened beverages being consumed by their students. Not only were the beverages filled with sugar, but children were not eating their packed lunches because they would immediately start their lunch by drinking their juice and as a result be too full to eat their food! To combat this problem, staff asked the parents to replace the juice with water or 1%/nonfat milk. To date, the center has almost 100% compliance with this request.

Inspired by their early win, staff began to wonder “what can we improve besides beverages?” During a staff meeting, one of the staff members – a personal trainer at the local gym – suggested implementing regular structured physical activities that would be done as an entire school. This idea blossomed into “Workout Wednesdays”. Every week, before going inside to start class, students gather outside for a preschool-wide workout. Students and teachers participate in yoga, stretching, relay racing, obstacle courses and other fun activities. Nicole Cendejas, a Lead Teacher and member of the site's Leadership Team, says the staff are using the Nemours' provided resource books to come up with their activities. When she first showed the books to the staff, she told them “these are your (physical activity) bibles.”



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In addition to just leading the physical activities with the children, the teachers are engaging the students in discussions around why activity is important for their bodies and why water and healthy food are good for them. The students at St. Anthony's love the change. Wednesday mornings are filled with shouts of "It's Workout Wednesday!" And after the workout, students have been saying "teacher, I'm ready to learn now!"

Students who bring water or milk for lunch for the entire week earn special privileges like a one-day "free dress pass" (meaning they don't have to wear their school uniform). Students are also sharing what they have learned with their parents. One mom reported that her child made the entire family order water (instead of soda) when they went out to dinner!



Parents are also buying into the changes by packing healthier lunches for their children and donating water bottles for those children who forget to pack their water bottle. Nicole says that it's "really nice to see our parents bring in water and care for our other students as well as their own children"

When asked to describe her experience in the program, Nicole says it has been "Encouraging. The program is encouraging us as educators to provide the best for our students and to support our parents. It makes us more involved in our community"

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