

Travis County Dell CATCH Elementary Success Stories

A Letter - From Theresa Artman, 4th Grade Teacher at Joslin Elementary



Growing up, I was always in several sports and my parents had a “No Artificial or Processed Foods” rule in our home. We had our own, very large vegetable garden, and we bought our meat, eggs and dairy products at a nearby farm. Our foods were all natural and organic long before it became hip like it is today. They were passionate about the tenets they were teaching to me and my sister, and they led by example. They taught me wonderful eating and exercise habits that served me well throughout adolescence and into my young adult life.

When I got married in 2005, I was in great shape and had no weight issues. All of my married friends said I would gain weight after I got married, but I thought they were all crazy. Well, lo and behold, after one year of marriage, I had gained 20 pounds! Dan and I were great about exercising together, but I usually deferred to him when it came to restaurant and grocery choices. Going to HEB together was like a fun date for us and I loved how happy Dan was when he picked the foods. We were literally like two kids in a candy store.

Rather than teaching him about healthy eating, I slowly allowed more and more fatty and fast foods (his favorite) into my diet. Needless to say, my system was in shock and I started to put on the pounds. I had increasingly lower energy levels, my skin broke out more often, and my clothes no longer fit me. I had never gone through anything like this before and I was disappointed with myself because I knew better.

So I finally decided to stop the madness. In November 2006, I had been teaching 4th grade at Joslin Elementary for several months, and I loved my new campus. The CATCH program was (and still is) part of my Science and Health curriculum and while teaching these lessons, I was reminded more and more of my parents and the lessons they had taught me. They led by example and I knew this was just the motivator I needed to get back to the healthy lifestyle my parents had so lovingly instilled in me: I would be an example to my students and my husband by getting back into shape and modeling healthy choices at school and at home.

By the end of that school year, I had lost 25 pounds! I exercised with my husband and my students, I ate fresh fruits and veggies (GO Foods) at home and at school, and I made it a daily goal to discuss food and exercise with those around me. I was able to use the CATCH program as the backbone for all of our health lessons.

Now, several years later, I continue to follow the teachings of my childhood and utilize the CATCH program to make learning about healthy choices fun and accessible.

I have been inspired by the Food of the Month program at Joslin Elementary and often bring new and unusual fruits and veggies for my kids to sample. I join in the fun CATCH activities, which are truly my favorite parts of the day. My students are constantly discussing food quality and nutritional facts at school and at home.

I am so glad the CATCH program is part of the A.I.S.D. curriculum. It was the wakeup call I needed! It enriches my students’ lives as well as my own!

Good Foods Salad Bowl Project, Maplewood Elementary



More than 50 community volunteers helped build 12 raised classroom garden beds at Maplewood Elementary, part of the Austin Independent School District. Students participating in the CATCH program at Maplewood Elementary also attended the volunteer session and took part in building the school gardens. The CATCH Champion provided snacks and supplies, while the volunteers provided the fun in building the garden beds. During the building session, teachers reviewed and learned the School Farm Guide with the Gardening Pros. After all of the classroom garden beds were complete, the students watched the vegetables sprout and grow into delicious foods that were

regularly eaten as snacks in class! Teachers at Maplewood Elementary created plant labels in English and Spanish to foster student literacy on each vegetable planted in the garden. **The Good Foods Salad Bowl Project created cross campus team collaboration at Maplewood Elementary.** For example, Ms. Jen Ober, the Art Teacher, helped every student and teacher make their own clay Salad Bowls! A Salad Bowl Extravaganza was held on April 25, 2008 to highlight all vegetables grown from the classroom garden beds. Parents were also invited to lunch with their children to eat vegetables and foods grown in the garden beds and to learn more about healthy eating and physical activity. The Maplewood Elementary Salad Bowl Project has provided a service learning opportunity for the students, teachers, parents, and community. **The project not only unified the campus, but created a neighborhood-wide commitment to seeing the project succeed.** The project also stimulated great inquisitiveness among the school and volunteer community - individuals wanted to learn how to successfully establish their own edible gardens. In addition, other organizations have requested road maps to duplicate the Salad Bowl Project's success.



The goals of the Salad Bowl Project at Maplewood Elementary include:

- Each Maplewood student has at least one gardening experience in 2007/2008
- Grow enough winter produce to host periodic free salad bars as part of Good Foods Fridays
- Promote good nutrition and healthy eating in conjunction with the Coordinated Approach To Child Health (CATCH) program
- Label garden plants in English and Spanish
- More fully utilize resources - Greenhouse, Science Lab, Rainwater Harvesting, garden beds
- Create community around good work and good food and measure by volunteer hours
- Promote stewardship of class gardens to assist with ongoing maintenance and watering
- Propagate plants to feed campus gardens, distribute to community and contribute to plant sales to raise money for gardening program

To date, Maplewood Elementary has 15 classroom garden beds that serve classrooms with impressive salad mixes throughout the school year.



A Story - From Teri Rice, River Oaks Parent

Incorporating fitness and fun can sometimes be a challenge, but it was one that the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) at River Oaks Elementary, part of the Pflugerville Independent School District, took seriously for the annual Fall Festival. Obesity is rampant across the nation and also in our school. Melissa Simonsen, Terri Rice and I were the Festival Fundraising Co-Chairs that organized and coordinated the 2008 Fall Festival, which took place on November 22, 2008. Our goals were to unite the parents and administration with our surrounding community, as well as to show our children that having fun and being healthy are not mutually exclusive. We partnered with our P.E. Coach, Gary Lane, and the CATCH committee.

In order to accomplish our goals, we focused on serving healthier foods and getting the children physically involved. Let's face it, so-called 'carnival' foods are not the healthiest and are usually deep fried and loaded with fat (saturated and trans), and/or sugars. We wanted to 'lighten' things up, so we worked with several local businesses to provide alternatives to the traditional 'carnival' foods such as Frito pie and nachos. We worked with Firehouse Subs and served turkey, ham and roast beef sandwiches with veggies, with the condiments on the side; Chik-Fil-A provided chicken sandwiches; and we served giant pickles and provided free ice and bottled water. Whole Foods Market generously donated a gift card that allowed us to provide a "Healthy Foods Station" where we served only healthy snacks, water and fresh fruits such as bananas, tangelos, boxes of organic raisins and fruit leather (Fruitabu and Stretch Island - only natural, organic real fruit). We sold out of the raisins and fruit leather!

We implemented several activities for the children that required getting physical. We started with the layout of the Festival; in previous years, festivals have taken place completely within the confines of the school building. This year we wanted our festival to be on a larger scale, so while we had some activities in the gym and the cafeteria, we also stretched the outdoor activities to take advantage of our large fields and playground areas. This, in turn, required people to spend more time walking while they were at the Festival. We offered traditional games such as the a football toss, fishing games, and old fashioned sack races, which ran the entire day and were full of participants. We gave out free tickets to the winners of the sack races, so that they would in turn stay at the Festival longer and participate in more activities. We also brought in many activities that provided hours of physical activity for the kids, including a giant Bowling Game, a revolving competitive Rock Wall that allowed two kids to simultaneously “compete” against each other (the speed and height could be adjusted to the delight of the kids), and three different Bounce Houses—courtesy of Crossroads Community Church.

In addition to the activities, we provided entertainment which included a dance performance, a martial arts demonstration, our school choir, and the Westview Middle School Cheerleaders. We wanted to show our students the many opportunities that are available to them throughout our community (or will be once they reach middle school). We also held a Silent Auction and solicited donations from local businesses that are more health conscious such as Yoga Yoga, Sunstone Yoga, Austin School of Classical Ballet, Texas Academy of Ballet, Round Rock Express, Whole Foods Market, Edible Arrangements, Chik-Fil-A, Freebirds, Firehouse Subs, Interstate Lanes (Bowling), Randalls (Safeway), Mama Fu's, Dream Dinners and P. Terry's. **We ended up with a 100% increase in profits over the previous year.**

We were really excited about trying healthier options this year and hope to add more new ideas next year. It was wonderful to see the community come together in such a healthy and positive manner.

Blackshear Elementary Dad - Unsung Hero

Mark Morales, a Blackshear Elementary School parent, was honored on April 30th at the second annual Austin Voices for Education and Youth *Shout Out Awards*, an event that recognized individuals who have taken action to strengthen public schools in Austin. Close to 300 guests attended this important event, including Dr. Meria Carstarphen, the newly hired superintendent of AISD. Dr. Carstarphen told the audience, “When Austin Voices is having a rally to help students, I’ll be in the crowd holding a sign!” Mark is truly an “unsung hero” who has generously donated the \$1,000 *Shout Out Award* he received to Blackshear Elementary; he designated that the funds be split by the library and arts program to help develop and nurture the love of reading and arts by all students at Blackshear.

Mark is truly deserving of this award as he has embraced every opportunity offered to become more involved in strengthening parent involvement in the education of children. His son entered the 3rd grade at Blackshear Elementary in the Austin Independent School District in the fall of 2008. Mark was encouraged by the many leadership opportunities available to him as a parent at Blackshear. To become better informed and involved in his son’s education, he first attended the morning Coffee Talks with the Principal and asked “Where are all the dads?” After talking with the principal, he founded a very small and informal dads group called “Fathers United.” The group meets once a month before school; it is a time for dads to get to know one other, form a bond with other dads, and discuss concerns they have about their children’s well being and education. Mark believes that dads are there for their children but they are not always a presence at school because of work or other reasons. He wants to change that mentality and work with dads to encourage them to become more involved in

their child's education and to become the role models their children need to succeed. Mark also serves on Blackshear's Campus Advisory Council (CAC), and served as the vice-president of Blackshear's PTA.

Mark also continues to pursue his vision to enhance parent involvement and student learning through the gardening projects at Blackshear. Projects he is interested in involve xeriscaping and beautification of the front of the school, expanding the small herb and vegetable garden to increase utilization by the different classes, and a butterfly garden. Mark sees the value of using gardens to teach lessons about nutrition, physical activity, and science; to connect with the community; and to share generational and cultural practices with children. Mark's vision is to move slowly to be sure the programs are sustained long after his son graduates to Middle School!



Pictured in the photo (L-R): Mark Morales, Arturo Garcia, Deborah Warren, Dr. Carstarphen, Arturo Garcia.

A Letter - From Kelley Matthews PTO President at River Oaks

Dear CATCH and the PTO,

The River Oaks Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is very pleased to be able to join forces with PE Coach Gary Lane and the CATCH program. Coach Lane brings valuable nutrition and physical health information to each and every meeting we hold. I believe this exposure to health-related information gives the parents a connection to what is going on in the school and to our dedication to good health for our students.

The PTO/CATCH partnership has also provided a great forum to promote health and family bonding events. We hosted a Thanksgiving "DRESS THE TURKEY" contest, which brought in 179 parents and family members to eat a healthy meal with their students; this was an increase of over 100 parents and family members from last year. We have also hosted Jump Rope for Heart, Marathon Kids, health fairs, "Super Kid's Day", and many more. Coach Lane has also partnered with our school nurse to provide presentations at PTO meetings on diabetes and asthma, attendance at these meetings was three-times our usual meeting participation.

River Oaks Elementary PTO looks forward to a continued partnership with Coach Lane and the CATCH program in our effort to provide a healthy influence to River Oaks students and their families.

Kelley Matthews, PTO President
River Oaks Elementary, Pflugerville Independent School District

Other CATCH Elementary School Stories

Hornsby-Dunlap Elementary - "Running Club"

Students at Hornsby-Dunlap Elementary, in the Del Valle Independent School District, are participating each morning before school in a Kids Running Club. The club provides students with the opportunity to run on the track and get additional physical activity to start their day. To participate in the club, students need to run a mile, but this hasn't seemed to discourage any participation! This activity began in the fall semester and continues to be strong in the spring as well. Teachers are raving about the beneficial effects in the classroom-especially with the students that may have had behavioral issues-there are fewer problems and students are eager and ready to learn!

St. Elmo Elementary - "CATCH Christmas Tree: Eat, Drink, and Be Merry"



St. Elmo Elementary in the Austin Independent School District hosted a student competition and school-wide drawing for a Christmas Give-Away focused on the St. Elmo Christmas Motto-Eat healthy foods, Drink lots of water, and Be Merry with exercise! The CATCH committee provided classroom teachers with colored sheets of paper for each student to draw, color, and create a "GO" CATCH activity ornament to decorate the Christmas tree in the school gymnasium. Students that contributed an ornament were entered into a drawing and the winning students were awarded a pair of free tennis shoes. St. Elmo was a CATCH Awards of Excellence School last year and continues to raise the bar for children's health!

Sunset Valley Elementary - "Jump Rope Clinic"

Sunset Valley Elementary in the Austin Independent School District hosted a jump rope clinic, where a jump rope expert shared jump rope techniques and tips. The event was held during the school assembly for all students on Inauguration Day. Sunset Valley was a \$3,000 Awards of Excellence Winner for the 2007-2008 school year and used some of the awards money to fund this event. Neal Rhea, PE

Teacher and CATCH Champion, organized this event and is reinforcing the lessons taught in his physical education classes.

Baty Elementary - "Afterschool Flag Football and Basketball Clinics"

Daniel Mojica, kindergarten teacher at Baty Elementary in the Del Valle Independent School District, together with Wallace Harris, have been offering an afterschool sports clinic for students since the fall of 2007. Both teachers had just begun their teaching careers, and after becoming friends learned they both shared a love for sports. They wanted to give back to their community by offering something they were passionate about and had played a huge role in their lives. They began their sports program last year with basketball, but it's taken off from there, offering Flag Football this past fall and basketball again this spring. Daniel and Wallace offer students in grades 4 and 5 the opportunity to learn team work, discipline, the importance of keeping up good grades, and staying in shape. They begin each clinic teaching the rules, practicing and playing skills games, and finally moving on to scrimmages for about a week before beginning league play. Students are divided into teams, creating a league in which students have their own teams that compete against other teams within their school. The students really enjoy this! They invite their friends, families, and even teachers to attend games and the scores are announced the following day during morning announcements. Pictures from the games are posted on the school CATCH bulletin board, and they end the season with a Baty Bowl; a game between students and teachers. Currently, spring basketball is underway and the program is continuing to grow; many of the students that played football in the fall are also playing basketball. There is a mix of boys and girls on the teams, for both sports, and the children continue to learn to be good sports and teammates, as well as well rounded individuals. Teachers have also noticed a difference in their students; they have more incentive to keep their grades up and are better behaved in class. Overall this program is a huge success at Baty where the entire community wins! Daniel serves on the CATCH Committee at Baty Elementary and was recognized for his commitment to the CATCH Program and children's health at the September 2008 Dell Travis County CATCH Awards and Recognition Reception at Whole Foods Market.