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Media Release

CCSD schools get creative when it comes to physical activity

Division of Strategy and Communications

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Charleston, SC – Health and physical education are an important part of Charleston County School District’s curriculum. Holly Kut, Instructional Specialist for Health and Physical Education encourages physical education (PE) teachers across the district to get creative whenever possible.

A growing trend among PE instructors is the use of climbing walls. Their use aligns with national standards and South Carolina standards for PE. Oakland Elementary School had one installed this year and joins Sanders-Clyde Elementary School, Drayton Hall Elementary School, Hunley Park Elementary School, Ladson Elementary School, Laurel Hill Primary School and Thomas C. Cario Middle School.

Oakland PE teacher April Blanton has taught at the school for 15 years. Their campus features a large gymnasium that could easily accommodate a climbing wall. Blanton’s colleague, Jonathan May, knew the benefits of a climbing wall from witnessing them first hand at the previous school he taught in. They agreed that the students at Oakland would love such an addition to their PE class. The problem she faced was funding the equipment.

Most fundraisers the school hosts don’t make enough to cover the average \$4,500 cost of a climbing wall. Blanton knew she would have to get creative. Ultimately a Fun Run was held and the order for the climbing wall was placed.

“This climbing wall allows us to provide an opportunity and experience to our students that they may not otherwise have access to,” said Oakland Principal Elizabeth Nicodin. “We are teaching our students that there are many ways to stay active and physically fit through nontraditional modes of exercise which include activities such as this. We are excited and grateful for this wonderful addition to our PE department. We are very thankful for all of the people who helped make this dream a reality including Mrs. Blanton, our PTO and Oakland families.”

The climbing wall was installed over Thanksgiving break and Blanton and May installed the hand holds, which can be changed to keep things challenging for the kids. Blanton explained that the hand holds allow for maneuvers such as tossing, and turning to changing direction. Everlast Climbing also sells additional handholds, Hula-hoops to climb through and more.

"The climbing wall helps build flexibility, upper body strength, and muscles in the arms and legs, which we discuss during our fitness unit," said Blanton. "Also important to note is that the climbing wall promotes problem solving. This type of activity is something new to most of the students at Oakland. There are few places open to the public that are not out of reach financially for some of our students."

"There are infinite things you can do with a climbing wall," said Blanton.

The additional physical benefits include increased brain stimulation and improved balance. Additionally, use of the climbing wall encourages cooperation amongst classmates because it requires concentration, goal setting, and decision making.

"Climbing in PE benefits the whole child, not just physically but socially and emotionally," said Kut. "It builds confidence, allows students to overcome fears, all while building self-esteem. When the teacher creates lesson plans effectively, the climbing wall will also provide opportunity to enhance leadership skills."

Steve Kamp is the PE instructor at Hunley Park. At a high school he previously taught in, the students had access to an extensive climbing wall with belay ropes. The high school student-athletes there used the climbing wall as part of their strength and conditioning routines.

At the elementary level, the first time students use the wall they're experiencing pure enjoyment, Kamp explained.

"As they progress, I incorporate varying skill levels that I continue to modify as we move through the unit," said Kamp. "The wall can be used as one of three fitness stations. Students must work as a team and problem solve. They must decide who is going to be the spotter, for example. This requires communication and thinking about the safety of themselves and their teammates. The wall provides so much more than fun."

Dr. Katchia Gethers, principal of Hunley Park Elementary School said she was encouraged about the potential of the climbing wall.

"I imagine that our students will be taught endurance and flexibility," said Gethers. "Once they are successful, rock climbing can build students' self-esteem and encourage them to take risks and persevere during difficult times. Additionally, rock climbing requires students to concentrate and think strategically about what it takes to reach a goal. All of these soft skills are transferable to the content areas, which impacts academic performance."

Everlast Climbing provides an entire lesson plan, tests, rules and safety procedures. Mats line the floor underneath the climbing wall for protection against injuries should a student fall. The mats also lock into place against the climbing wall so that the equipment can't be accessed without a specialized key.

Blanton enjoys teaching the K-5 age group because the students are easy to engage and persuade to try new things.

"As a PE instructor I love knowing I can expose my students a various types of physical activity that they can continue for a lifetime," said Blanton. "It's a way to introduce the students to different types of sports and activities."

Kamp is the head coach for varsity and junior varsity boys' lacrosse, football, and basketball. He knows all too well the importance of offering students and athletes a variety of physical activities.

"The climbing wall allows me to combine my coaching knowledge with my teaching knowledge," said Kamp. What my colleagues and I try to do with our students is promote lifelong physical fitness, and we hope the kids carry that mindset with them. Maybe they'll be inspired by the climbing wall to one day go climb a mountain."

Blanton said the students are excited about the climbing wall and she is excited for them.

"Teaching problem solving in a world that is 100 percent technology based is so critical," said Blanton. "Technology often creates a situation where thinking doesn't have to happen. With a climbing wall students can't just 'Google it.' They have to use their brain to figure it out."

For more information contact the Division of Strategy and Communications at (843) 937-6303.

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally-accredited school district that is committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all of its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 87 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools. Options include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military.