

Federal grant bringing new fitness centers to local schools

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By [Leila Summers](#)

When Longview middle and high school students return to school in January, new treadmills and other cardio workout machines should be up and running in school weight rooms.

School officials are using a federal grant this fall to revamp weight rooms into “fitness centers” that incorporate cardio machines and nutrition lessons into daily workout sessions.

“The whole idea is ... when they leave our doors, they’re still going to be active and living healthy lifestyles,” said Chris Fritsch, Director of Leadership and Learning for Longview Schools on Monday afternoon.

Longview School Board on Monday agreed to spend \$68,000 of a \$650,000 three-year federal grant for new equipment, including ellipticals, treadmills, rowing machines and stepping machines. The grant is in its second year.

The project is part of a national trend by schools to get students more active and healthier, Fritsch said. It also teaches students healthy lifestyle lessons they can carry with them throughout life, he said.

About 68 percent of Cowlitz County residents are obese or overweight, according to Cowlitz On the Move. In the last 30 years, the number of obese children nationwide has doubled, according to a recent report from the Institute of Medicine. In 2004, 9 million American children were at an increased risk of type 2 diabetes and other diseases associated with being overweight. CNN reported recently that 17 percent of youths ages 12 to 19 were estimated to be obese in a 2003-2006 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study. That number was just 5 percent in the late 1970s.

It’s important to teach students about healthy nutrition and the importance of keeping fit, Fritsch said.

Each school will receive different products, “depending on what the building already had,” he said.

“It depended on what the building decided to spend their allocation on,” he said.

Cascade Middle School is the only middle school not participating in the grant project because the school

“already has a well-established fitness center,” Fritsch said. Both high schools are receiving equipment.

New equipment has also been purchased for the elementary schools, including new jump ropes, light-weight dumbbells and elliptical machines, Fritsch said.

In addition to equipment, grant money is providing training for PE teachers to help students adopt healthy lifestyles, Fritsch said. Representatives from a Spokane fitness company are visiting Longview PE staff about improving their fitness programs. The grant also pays to send some Longview PE teachers to state conferences.

Students of all grade levels are asked to keep journals about their exercise outside of school, Fritsch said. The journals are checked quarterly by teachers to see if students are adapting exercise into their lives outside of school, he said.

The federal Carol M. White grant is part of the Physical Education for Progress program with in the Department of Education. The goal, according to the grant Web site, is to encourage “a lifelong commitment to physical fitness and reduce the significant health care costs that result from obesity, inactivity and poor diet.”

On the Net:

Carol M. White Physical Education Program: www.ed.gov/programs/whitephysed/index.html

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