

Principal at Coventry HS participates in fitness test



Angelena Chapman/Daily Times

L-R: The principal at Coventry High School, Michael Hobin, took part in the P.A.C.E.R. test on Friday, a part of determining which students are in the healthy fitness zone; The new wellness center at Coventry High.

Physical education department hopes to give kids “functional fitness.”

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COVENTRY—Last Friday the principal at Coventry High School showed his support for physical education by participating with students in a fitness test.

Students are required to complete the FITNESSGRAM physical fitness assessment, designed to identify their current state of physical fitness and provide them with information to improve and maintain their personal health, physical education teachers say.

In the assessment students find out if they are in “the healthy fitness zone” for their age level.

The assessments are the P.A.C.E.R. test, curl-ups, trunk lift, push-ups and the shoulder stretch.

On Friday, Feb. 11, Principal Michael

Hobin, took part in the P.A.C.E.R. test with a group of students.

For the P.A.C.E.R. test students run as many laps as they can in a 20-meter space.

The test is run to audio “beeps” that get faster each minute, making the test more difficult with each lap.

At Coventry High School if they reach a certain number of laps they get a bottle of water, which Hobin told Deborah Pacheco, the physical education curriculum coordinator, was his goal.

Hobin completed 51 laps, placing him inside the healthy fitness zone for boys 17 and up, though Pacheco said the number of laps to reach the healthy fitness zone may actually be less when you reach a certain age.

Hobin said, “I feel good,” afterward and that the test was harder than he thought it would be.

Hobin, who recently lost 30 pounds on his treadmill at home, said he watched last semester’s P.A.C.E.R. test and saw the encouragement the students gave each other as they ran.

Hobin got a few cheers himself Friday and applause from students watching in the gymnasium at Coventry High School.

Students start out in groups and drop out as

they reach their limit, allowing students who are able to keep running.

Instead of being embarrassed to have their peers watch them when they are the last ones out there, Pacheco said she tells students they should be proud of themselves.

“What they get is respect,” she said.

Scott, 16, a sophomore ran 111 laps on Friday, one of the highest numbers of the day. Scott participates in cross-country and tennis, but not all the athletes do as well in the assessments, Pacheco said.

Scott said he is in much better shape this year and was able to get his laps up from 101 to 111. He said last year nobody was into it and just stopped running at 94, the top number for the healthy fitness zone for boys his age.

The FITNESSGRAM assessment used by Coventry is from a company called Human Kinetics.

It requires computer software for the department and training for the physical education teachers.

The assessment is given at the beginning of each semester and they are also looking to give it at the point of the final exam.

See COVENTRY, Page A-2

Coventry principal takes part in fitness test

Continued from Page A-1

They haven't determined exactly how they will grade it.

However, even if students don't reach the healthy fitness level, but they make "significant" improvement they may deserve to earn a very good grade, Pacheco said.

One student told Pacheco she went from 17 laps to 32, still not in the healthy fitness zone, but a major increase.

Some can't reach the healthy fitness level and Pacheco said it's not their fault; also adding that just being in the program has helped students lose up to 50 pounds

Which classes students take may directly affect how they end up doing in different assessments.

Pacheco said she would like to see students start as freshman and work towards the goal of reaching the healthy fitness zone.

The students receive a FITNESSGRAM report, where they can clearly see where they are in the healthy fitness zone and what they can do with the results.

Teachers also get a statistical report, which they can use to see what grade levels are the most physically fit.

In addition to the physical element of the test, there is a writing portion with different questions depending on grade level.

For example, the 12 grade students are asked when, within the last four years, they have been the closest to being the most physically fit and what factors they think contributed to it.

With students only in physical education for half a year, Pacheco said they want to give them the tools they need to stay physically fit when they are no longer at Coventry High School.

"Functional fitness," Pacheco said.

Students must pass four years of physical education to graduate.

Pacheco said they understand the district is strapped and the department is coming up with "new and creative" ways to give students those "pleasurable experiences" in physical education.

For example, students can take classes of their choosing, such as elementary games—

which may include dodge ball or tag—, weight training, walk fitness or others.

She said juniors and seniors fill up the elementary games classes.

They are moving forward, she said, "away from skills and drills."

"[The students] are moving constantly now," Pacheco said, part of the department's philosophy.

In volleyball students will learn how to play an "enjoyable" game of volleyball with people of all skill levels, while toning and cardiovascular elements are added in because of the long block, she said.

"It's not just a traditional gym class," Pacheco said.

New this year is the wellness center at Coventry High School.

Pacheco credited the administrators for working hard to ensure the opening of the wellness center and Hobin for being instrumental in getting the room.

Currently, both students and staff can come to the center two mornings a week at 6 a.m. to workout, often side-by-side, Stephen McKanna, another physical education teacher, said.

The wellness center is "loaded with state of the art equipment," McKanna said.

The equipment there is mostly for strength and conditioning. Getting cardio equipment would be the next step, Pacheco said.

The room can also be used by sports teams.

What he can do in the wellness center far surpasses what they were able to do in the previous space, McKanna said.

They fundraised as well as received donations of some of the equipment.

The hope would be that students, parents and others from the community could come and use the center after school or in the summer, Pacheco explained, "in the long run."

Joseph Lucian, an assistant principal, who oversees the wellness center, talked about the changes already made on the nutrition end of wellness and now the emphasis on the fitness element.

"Food portions" have been talked about, but now the need is to give students "creative ways to exercise," he said.

The faculty is also getting involved, Lucian said, which helps because teachers are "living what [they] say."

"We have to change how we define physical education," Pacheco said.

Pacheco said that while the public might not understand the need for a physical education class and think kids should be in sports, Pacheco and Lucian pointed out that not everyone can afford to put their children in premier sports leagues or afford the costs of uniforms or equipment.

Pacheco, along with other physical education educators met with Rhode Island Department of Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist in January.

Pacheco said they talked with her about placing something concerning a student's healthy fitness level on his or her transcript. Pacheco said Gist liked the idea.

The meeting was about how physical education fits into Race to the Top.

Pacheco thinks elevating fitness to the level of the NECAP or SAT scores and placing it on a resume or transcript is something colleges or employers would like to see, as well as parents.

If they are healthy, "they are out of work less," Pacheco said and "if they take care of their bodies, they'll take care of their jobs."

If students didn't have to pass the NECAP's in 11 grade, "they wouldn't try so hard," Pacheco said.

"Health is just as important. A healthy mind, a strong body," she said.

Hobin said the physical education department is great and that the teachers are "all rowing in the same direction."

He said they are physically fit themselves and pay attention to what they eat.

Whether it is an athlete, a mother with three kids who needs energy after work or someone who needs to keep their blood pressure down or diabetes at bay, the Coventry High School physical education department wants students and the school community "to be able to live the healthiest lifestyles" possible, Pacheco said.