

## Frequently Asked Questions

1. **When did the program start?** The program started in 2004 in response to parents request for a Zero Hour PE class so that students enrolled in the Academic Reading class could also take an elective in our current 8 period day because Academic Reading was an elective. The program has evolved over the years and now the PE classes or Learning Readiness PE LRPE classes run throughout the day.

2. **What types of students participate and is participation mandatory?** Currently, students identified as reading below grade level and those students who are struggling in math are recommended for the program known as LRPE. This puts them in the PE class a period or two prior to the Academic Reading class or Introduction to Algebra class they are enrolled in. Participation is not required but strongly encouraged and parents must meet with the Co-coordinator of the program either individually or by attendance at a meeting to explain the science behind the program in order to option their student out.

3. **What are the activities?** The activities in the PE class are varied. Every other day is a cardio work out of some kind. Heart rate data is taken with the hopes of students acquiring 20 minutes in the zone between 155-200 beats per minute. A caution here is to make sure that this PE class does not turn into a boot camp scenario, otherwise students will become disenchanted with it. Team building activities are also critical. Cross lateral activities and activities requiring balance are also valuable. Balance is another component that needs emphasis. At lower levels, coordination and loco-motive movements is crucial.

**How did students respond to the shift to a fitness focus as opposed to sports?** The shift was gradual. Exercise is hard work and most people don't enjoy it so emphasis needs to be constant on the value of fitness. Goal setting helps students understand where they are and where they need to improve. PE teachers cannot necessarily make students fit. However then can arm them with the information they need to make themselves fit and try to motivate them to improve.

4. **What equipment is used?** Heart rate monitors are an important piece of equipment to insure students are exercising adequately. Other than that, traditional PE equipment and activities are utilized. If students participate in traditional team sports activities those activities are done with small sided games i.e. 3 vs. 3 or 4 vs. 4 in games like soccer so all students are engaged.

5. **What time of day do the students participate?** In our district, participation in the LRPE class can occur throughout the day. **The key** is to have a student take the LRPE class 1-2 hours before the academic class in which the student struggles. This is critical!

6. **How long do students participate in the activity/PE class?** Besides daily activity of 50 minutes in the LRPE class, academic teachers make a conscious effort to incorporate movement and brain breaks in their 50 minute classes.

**7. Is there a toolkit or manual for teachers to use?** Currently, there is no toolkit or manual in place. This is a program that is constantly evolving. What is very important is that quality PE instruction and academic instruction occurs with the students in the program. Just as is the case in any educational setting, **quality teaching** is the key to the program's success.

**8. Do you have any partnerships with community agencies or public health units?** In Naperville because of the extent of our extracurricular program, facilities before and after school are utilized by school programs at the high school. If partnerships can be established so that the program can be enhanced, it certainly is advisable. Some schools have created business partnerships to help acquire exercise equipment for their program.

**9. What types of grants have you been awarded?** We were fortunate to win a PEP grant which certainly helps us improve our equipment and facilities. It took no less than four attempts to write a successful grant. Finally, we enlisted the aid of a grant writer. However, it should be noted that prior to receiving the grant we had exercise equipment and rooms dedicated to house the equipment. It took many years to acquire these pieces of equipment but it was well worth the challenge.

**10. What was the cost to begin your program?** The cost to begin the program was somewhat minimal because many of the pieces to the puzzle were already in place. The PE program started evolving away from the traditional sports model of PE to a fitness/wellness based model. We started using heart rate monitors in 1992. The first set was purchased through moneys from fund raisers and PTA participation and finally support from the school's administration. We had already moved from teaching sports in the traditional way to teaching/offering sports using small sided teams to allow for more participation by all students. This requires the purchase of more equipment. So instead of 22 students using 1 soccer ball, 3 soccer balls are needed, plus the cones to set-up smaller fields -- and 6 smaller goals are needed instead of two large goals. The PEP grant allowed us to train teachers in team building activities through "Project Adventure."

**11. What is the cost to sustain your program?** This year has taught us that time spent in collaboration between teachers involved in the program was extremely important. This allowed them to effectively schedule inter-related activities together. When tests or quizzes were given, a cardio session in PE was planned for that day. Ideas like figuring ways to allow review work during exercise sessions in PE became part of the program.

A commitment to maintain smaller class sizes is important to the success of the program. We try to hold the enrollment in the LRPE classes to 25. The math classes are held at 24 students. Many of the classes have an equal number of regular ed. and special education students so these classes are team taught by a regular ed. math teacher and a certified special ed. teacher. The Academic classes average 10-12 students.

The next most expensive cost of the program is maintaining the equipment once it has been purchased. Money is needed to repair exercise equipment as well as maintaining heart rate monitors. Replacement of sports equipment is necessary because additional equipment is needed as more students are involved.

We utilize a computer based math program titled **ALEKS**. This allows students to progress at their own rate of speed and enhances the lessons taught in the classroom by the teachers. Students use this program at school twice per week. Additionally, since it is a web based program, students can work on it at home as well to improve their math ability.

**12. How do you evaluate your program/ have you done any studies?** We use nationally-normed tests to evaluate our program. In reading we have used the Nelson-Denny reading test, and this year - 2010 we changed to the Gates-McGinitie test. We use the Fitness-gram test to assess the fitness level of students. This year, we have engaged an independent researcher to create a study of the program. This study will include the academic and fitness data as well as antidotal data from surveys of students, teachers, and parents involved in the program.

**13. What are some of the key results?** When comparing students in the math classes and academic reading classes who have had the LRPE class prior to those classes, as opposed to the students in the same academic classes but have PE classes afterward, the results are striking in favor of preceding academic classes with LRPE classes. Charts have been created over the years and are located on the website [www.learningreadinesspe.com](http://www.learningreadinesspe.com) under the categories of Mathematics and Freshmen Literacy. Across the board the overweight and obesity level of students at Naperville Central H. S. is under 10%

**14. What are some strengths of your model?** Without a doubt, the strength of the program lies in the abilities of the teacher in the program to motivate and improve the lives of the students. Strong teaching cannot be over looked when trying to recreate this model.

**15. What areas are there for further developing your model?** The intention of the Naperville school district is to incorporate this program at more levels in the system -- elementary level and middle school levels need to incorporate the concepts of the brain science.

**16. Do you have any goals or objectives for the next evaluation period?** We are looking forward to working with the data we have collected this year and use it to enhance the program for the future. Improvement is something the Naperville school district always strives for.

**17. What does a typical day/ week look like?** We have learned that aerobic activity is the key to the program. Other areas of emphasis are core strength, balance, coordination and cross lateral movement and team building. A cardio workout is scheduled for every other day -- so some weeks have 3 days and some weeks have 2 days of cardio work. Coordination between the groups is necessary. If a test is being given, then a cardio day is scheduled and possibly some activity

involving movement and material review. It is important to make sure that students also have enjoyment thrown into the mix.

**18. What are some of the pitfalls to developing this program in our district/school?** Going in you need to know that you will make mistakes along the way and that re-evaluation of the program is essential. Problems we've seen with other schools trying this program have been a lack of administrative support with regards to scheduling and class size. Poor enthusiasm for the program by the educators involved in the program has been an issue. Parent understanding of the program and the value it brings to their student needs to occur. Poor decisions and the evaluation tools have caused some districts problems. Looking at this program as a panacea for all the ills that plague a school is a mistake. The mix of students needs to be such that a good role model is available for students to observe working out and striving to improve academic performance. A school tried to help the bottom 25 students in a freshmen class by putting them all in the program together and they were scheduled in 4 classes together at the beginning of a school day. Most schools believe they understand the program after learning of it and reading about it. It is complex and we have evolved over years. A very good understanding of the brain science is needed by all involved...teachers, administrators, school boards, parents and of course students.

**19. If you could list the priorities needed to replicate this program what would they be?**

- A quality PE program must be in place based on fitness and wellness.
- A commitment on the part of administration for the program is a must. This includes scheduling students, class sizes, collaboration time.
- A champion or two in the building. It can come in the form of teachers or leaders of administrators.
- A plan for creating and evaluating data. The data must be relevant and measureable. This takes time and effort in most districts since data collection is usually in place.
- A plan to teach/engage all participants of the program in the process.

**It should be noted that Paul Zientarski is available for consultations services to districts. For information about his availability contact him at.**

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