
Posted on Thu, Apr. 12, 2007

Young Students Hustle Toward Marathon

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Contributing Writer

The students of O.C. Taylor Elementary School are running a lot these days, and with good reason.

Two months ago, 500 students at the Grapevine school attempted to run a total of 26.2 miles over the span of several weeks as part of a marathon to promote health and fitness. The marathon will culminate in the annual Hound Dog Hustle on April 28 at Grapevine Lake.

Physical Education Coach Jason Mester said that as of last weekend, every single student was on track to reach his or her goal.

"We like to incorporate walking and jogging into our program and thought we could set some kind of goal for them," Mester said. "My assistant, Amy Berryhill, has done the Hound Dog Hustle for a number of years now and we thought it would be cool if we could make a marathon out of it and make the last mile be at the Hound Dog Hustle, and we are all on pace to achieve our goal."

The Hound Dog Hustle is an annual charity run put on by the Lake Grapevine Runners and Walkers that benefits area animal rescue groups.

Mester said the response he and Berryhill have received from the students has been phenomenal.

"They have really enjoyed it," Mester said on Saturday. "We are getting really close now, I think about 20 miles, we've got the countdown almost there and a lot of them have commented on how much it has helped them in their athletics."

Third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students are jogging the 26.2 miles in class, while kindergarten, first-, and second-grade students have been allowed to log their miles at school and at home.

"This is really helping them improve their cardiovascular endurance," Mester said. "They are getting out there and are able to go for a longer period of time without getting tired. We are stressing that they don't run ...but that they get themselves out to a nice slow jogging pace that they can continue for a long period of time."

Mester said he has approached some of the gym teachers at other local elementary schools about possibly expanding the program to other locations and said he feels that it will remain a yearly tradition at O.C. Taylor.

"We wanted to see if someone had done anything like this before and no one had," Mester said. "We are hoping that it may catch on and some of them will incorporate it next year. I think this will become a tradition at our school. We may set different goals. I'm not sure if we will always use the marathon format, but we will definitely try to do something like this."

Mester said, more than anything else, he wants the experience to inspire a healthy and active lifestyle for his students.

"I hope these kids take away something that is lifelong," Mester said. "Not many people go on to play basketball and football and baseball ... professionally, but everybody can go out and exercise and walk and jog their entire life to stay healthy."

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