

Featured Mental Health Initiative

Leaf Rapids Education Centre Fitness and Wellness Project Leaf Rapids Education Centre (Leaf Rapids, MB)

Background

Leaf Rapids Education Centre is part of the Frontier School Division in Leaf Rapids, Northern Manitoba, with 160 students in Kindergarten to grade 12. Leaf Rapids is a community located 235 km from Thompson, MB, which is where the nearest fitness centre is located. The roads between the community and the fitness centre are in deplorable condition, so developing and maintaining a personal or family fitness program is quite challenging due to the limited access to a proper facility. Being able to provide cardio and weight training equipment to the students and staff at school and, eventually, community members, would improve the health and well-being of students and the greater school community.

Promising Practice

Leaf Rapids Education Center is developing a school-based fitness and wellness centre to meet the needs of the students, staff, and community members. Having access to a proper strength and conditioning training facility is important, and would overcome the geographical barriers to well-being. Student learning is positively affected by physical activity, and especially during this pandemic, there have been growing concerns in



the school community regarding mental health. The primary goal of creating a fitness and wellness center is to support youth in developing or maintaining a healthy lifestyle, as well as understanding that practicing good health is a lifelong process that continues long after one's public education journey is complete.

The centre will be developed in three phases. The centre will be located on the third floor of the school, so there is the ability to vent out the roof. In phase one, the fitness area will be developed, which will offer a combination of weight and aerobic machines, free weights, yoga equipment, and free training on how to use the equipment. In phase two, a nutrition program will be created where staff will engage, instruct, and work with students to help them build healthy relations with food. Phase three includes the creation of a cultural area where students can engage with traditional knowledge keepers in activities such as drumming, dance, ceremony and story telling.

Impact

The Fitness and Wellness Center's primary goal is to teach youth that developing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle is a lifelong process. The staff is hoping to positively impact the students by encouraging them to focus on their personal fitness, participate in cultural activities, and to make informed nutrition choices. Success will be measured through student and staff engagement with the centre, aiming for 80% of the school community to regularly engage with activities offered through the centre.

Sustainability

The centre will be accessible by the greater community by Fall 2021. Funding will be sourced through national and provincial charitable grants, the school equipment based budget, donations, and school-wide fundraising. The center has no user fees so that it can remain equally accessible to families, staff and students of all income levels. The centre is wheelchair accessible and staff support will be offered to those who are in need of extra support when utilizing the facility.

Modifications

Here are suggestions to modify this approach for different learning environments.

- If your school does not have a room to designate as a Wellness Centre, provide physical activity equipment and store it in a *Wellness Box* for students to use the equipment in a safe area of the school
- Focus on one aspect of wellness and provide students with access to opportunity (i.e. create a nutritional breakfast program, invite Elders to your school to share traditional Indigenous culture, or create an outdoor physical activity school-wide challenge)
- Connect with a local gym or Fitness Centre and inquire if there are any opportunities for students to access the facility at a reduced fee or if they would consider providing low to no cost fitness classes to students over their lunch hour

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