

The Del Paso Heights Elementary School Wellness Program



Danielle Sturgeon- Site Coordinator of the Sacramento START After School Program standing in front of one of many murals painted throughout the school campus to showcase their Wellness Committee's commitment to healthy choices and behaviors for all students.

Danielle Sturgeon is the Site Coordinator for the [Sacramento START after school program](#) at Del Paso Heights Elementary School in Sacramento County. The Sacramento START program operates 33 after school programs within 4 school districts in the Sacramento County area. The after school program at Del Paso Heights serves 98 K-6 students and is funded by an After School Education and Safety (ASES) grant provided by the California Department of Education. Their program is very similar to many of the more than 4,400 publicly funded after school programs throughout the state providing students with a safe and caring environment that promotes academic enrichment opportunities and a healthy meal during the after school hours.

During the 2011-12 school year Del Paso became certified as a [Healthy Behaviors Initiative \(HBI\) Learning Center](#). Over the last 10 years HBI has developed 26 Learning Centers throughout the state as working labs to teach more than 800 after school programs how to intentionally incorporate nutrition, physical activity, and food security into their programs.

One of the requirements for becoming an HBI Learning Center is to have the site coordinator serve on the school's wellness committee and ensure that the wellness policy includes the afterschool program. When Danielle approached Del Paso Principal Leo Alvarez (with whom she had already established a solid partnership based on collaboration and trust) about joining the wellness committee, he not only invited her to participate, he asked her to Chair the committee! At that time, the wellness committee was not active at the school and Mr. Alvarez felt that since Danielle was already implementing wellness practices in after school, she and her program could be a model for the school as a whole and she would be an excellent choice for leading the effort to establish wellness practices for the entire school site.

During the 2012-13 school year the committee brought nutrition education to the classroom; My Plate curriculum for all primary grade levels (facilitated by Ms. Sturgeon), Dairy Council curriculum for the intermediate grade levels (implemented by school day teachers with support from the Health Education Council) and Harvest of the Month for all students, (also implemented by school day teachers). Del Paso was also awarded a fruit and vegetable grant, providing fresh fruit or vegetables every day for the entire year for every student in order to promote fresh produce and expose students to varieties of produce that they might not normally have access to. The culminating event for this grant was a farmer's market which provided free produce for all of the Del Paso students. This was also the first year of school-wide wellness events including the Annual Fair and Annual School Jogathon, both of which continue today.

This year the Del Paso Heights wellness committee became a subdivision of their School Site Council in order to get more buy-in and input from teachers and parents. The committee has also expanded its partnerships in the community, not only with the Health Education Council, but also with the Fit Kids Program and Prevention First. With the addition of these new partnerships, the committee is currently drafting a new wellness policy and planning is in the works to create more wellness oriented school wide events including both school day and after school program staff and students. Some of these school wide activities and events target before-school time (Walking school bus - safe routes to school, and late start Wednesday - workout Wednesdays). Others utilize after school program staff to provide structured physical activity facilitated by 6th graders (Junior Coaches) under the direction of the after school site coordinator.

Clearly the overall success of the Del Paso Heights wellness committee stems in large part from the intentional partnership and collaboration between school day and after school staff and programs, thus enabling a vibrant school wellness program to be carried out for all of Del Paso's students, staff and families.