
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Kipping Pull-Ups for KIPP School

Knowledge Is Power Program school relies on Los Angeles affiliate owners to help bring CrossFit to new East L.A. junior high.

By Laura Bruner

March 2014



Candice Ryu

Students at Camino Nuevo Charter Academy have been doing CrossFit since 2012 thanks to Candace Ryu.

Paul Austad, Candice Ryu and Shirley Brown didn't know each other until recently, even though the three grew up in the same rough area of East Los Angeles and have been exposed to much of the same adversity.

But now they're banding together for a greater cause. Along with a woman named Alice Lai, the three will be instrumental in helping make CrossFit part of a new junior high opening this fall.

Lai is an advocate for bringing education and CrossFit to kids who need it most. Through the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), Lai is opening a new junior high school to serve the East L.A. area. Located around the country, KIPP schools are free and have a track record of helping students in underserved communities achieve success in academics and life.

What sets the East L.A. school apart from other KIPP institutions is CrossFit, which Lai will be implementing into the curriculum.

Education at Its Finest

To prepare, Lai went through the Fisher Fellowship Program, which she said is a one-year course that assists educators in the development of a new KIPP school. Through the program, she learned the five pillars of the KIPP approach—high expectations, choice and commitment, more time, power to lead, and focus on results—and Lai said she felt prepared for the task ahead. But there was one thing missing: a physical-education program that would stack up next to the academics.

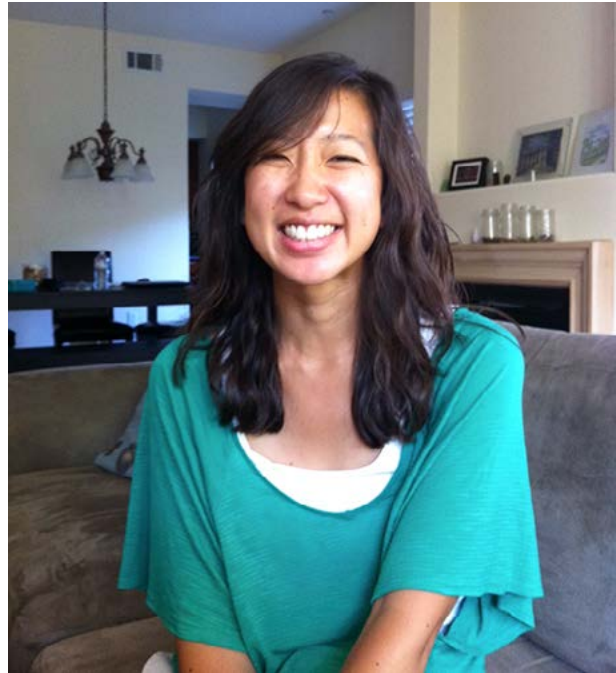
“Every CrossFit representative I met warmly welcomed me and offered to help in any way possible to start my school with a CrossFit P.E. curriculum.”

—Alice Lai

“I first heard about CrossFit a few years ago when some friends of mine raved about the program,” Lai said. “At the time, I thought it was just for adults and a very intense and intimidating workout for a normal, non-athletic person such as myself.”

That all changed, though, when she learned of other schools that use CrossFit for physical education.

“This past summer I learned about how the Noble Network of Charter Schools incorporates CrossFit as the backbone of their P.E. program,” she said. “I saw the impact it has



Alice Lai

The Knowledge Is Power Program has 141 schools around the U.S., and Alice Lai (top) will be adding to that number.



Candice Ryu

Students at host of charter schools, including those at Camino Nuevo Charter Academy (above), are doing CrossFit as part of fitness and leadership education.

had on the students' self-esteem, teamwork and growth mindset. All this and so much more are critical environmental factors that can increase student achievement."

A trip to the CrossFit Games in July of 2013 reaffirmed her decision.

"When I visited the CrossFit Games, I was struck by the deep sense of community and commitment to the CrossFit way of life," she recalled. "Every CrossFit representative I met warmly welcomed me and offered to help in any way possible to start my school with a CrossFit P.E. curriculum."

Bonding Through Burpees

As soon as Lai returned home, she got to work to open the KIPP Academy of Innovation, and she was confident the CrossFit community would help her implement CrossFit as a health, fitness and leadership program at her school.

"At the KIPP Academy of Innovation, students will participate in CrossFit-oriented P.E. classes two to three times a week," she said. "We will partner with an existing CrossFit box to create a tailor-made middle school, CrossFit-oriented P.E. curriculum teaching physical fitness and nutrition and building a deep sense of team and a growth mindset to conquer our biggest challenges," she said.

To get things started, Lai reached out to three local affiliate owners. All responded and met with her to set goals, establish lesson plans, help with curriculum development and create a solid support system.

That's where Austad, Ryu and Brown come in. Austad is the owner of CrossFit Eagle Rock and jumped at the chance to work with Lai.

"This is an opportunity to teach healthy lifestyles from a young age and shape the future of these kids," he said. "It

goes beyond CrossFit to create a special community that can help kids thrive.”

Ryu also had experience working with kids. In 2012, she brought CrossFit to Camino Nuevo Charter Academy and started Camino Nuevo CrossFit Kids.

“In this stage of life, many kids are apathetic, but I have seen a total shift,” Ryu said. “They are now showing ownership of their fitness and health, a desire to be better and a sense of empowerment. That’s huge for junior-high students to see that.”

Brown, owner of CrossFit LA, also has a CrossFit Kids program, and she recently started an after-school program at Westside Neighborhood School.



Candice Ryu

While traditional physical education focuses on rules of sports, CrossFit-based programs give children the tools with which to remain fit and healthy.

“I have seen many kids gain confidence in life and more awareness about health, fitness and nutrition, which is exciting,” she said. “CrossFit Kids allows everyone to participate and is an encouraging environment. I hope it helps kids learn to love to move their body.”

Lai’s dream will become reality in the fall of 2014, and the school will serve students from Grade 5 to Grade 8—primarily Latinos and English-language learners, who will receive free lunch or reduced rates for lunch.

High Fives and Helping Hands

“At the KIPP Academy of Innovation, we strongly believe in the power of the mind-body connection,” Lai said. “We believe that daily aerobic exercise physically remodels the brain for peak performance. We believe in the power of physical fitness to maximize learning in the classroom.”

With that philosophy guiding them, Lai, Austad, Ryu and Brown believe the East L.A. community will benefit from the school and CrossFit. The three affiliate owners plan to be involved.

“The overwhelming positive responses, willingness to help and openness to share ideas (reflect) the genuineness of the CrossFit community.”

—Alice Lai

“My plan is to be active all the way through the school’s initial planning, first day of school and beyond by helping with lesson plans, programming and even coaching, if needed,” Austad said.

He knows the impact the school can have on the district and is well versed in the success of KIPP schools through his past experience with other KIPP teachers.

“The KIPP program proves you can achieve goals—even if they’re outside of your means—with support from the community and passion to make a difference, and I am excited to be that support system for Alice and this school,” he said.



Paul Austad

At CrossFit Eagle Rock in Los Angeles, Paul Austad works with young athletes through the affiliate's CrossFit Kids program. He'll be using that experience to help the new KIPP school in East L.A.

"My interactions with local Los Angeles CrossFit affiliates have been a transformative experience as I begin my school," Lai said. "The overwhelming positive responses, willingness to help and openness to share ideas (reflect) the genuineness of the CrossFit community."

What's Next

Lai is confident in her plans and excited for what's to come when the school opens. For their part, Austad, Ryu and Brown are inspired and hope to help other teachers see the impact CrossFit will have on the students—physically, emotionally and cognitively.

"If we can get even just a handful more teachers to implement CrossFit, we will be making a huge difference in the lives of so many kids," Austad said.



About the Author

Laura Bruner works for CrossFit Inc. to bring CrossFit and education together through her work with schools, teachers, administrators and affiliates. She is also a trainer on CrossFit's Level 1 Seminar Staff and a coach at NorCal CrossFit in San Jose, Calif. Email Laura@CrossFit.com with questions or thoughts about CrossFit and education.