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CrossFit Kids: An Administrator's View

Assistant principal Chris Spurlock reviews the effects CrossFit Kids had on the P.E. program at Savannah Christian Preparatory School.

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All: Savannah Christian Preparatory School

In the 2013 school year, our school undertook a major change in its physical-education department: we implemented a CrossFit Kids curriculum for kindergarten to Grade 12.

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The results were immensely rewarding and stimulated much learning. While I learned many things, three in particular have become very apparent from an administrator's point of view: CrossFit Kids works perfectly in the general population (i.e., the classroom), teachers of all subjects could benefit from CrossFit education and seminars, and CrossFit Kids can save physical education.

Fitness for All

As taught at the CrossFit Level 1 Trainer Course, and as we experience in the WOD, we are all weak at the edge of our experiences. As we increase our exposure to new things, our weaknesses become strengths and we find new weaknesses that need to be addressed. This concept applies not only to individuals but also to groups.

What we found is that by bringing CrossFit Kids into a general population or classroom, we are promoting participation in physical activity by students who would never consider going to a gym. By including these students, we bring in new sets of strengths and experiences to the group, which increases the total experience of the group.

Students from all physical-fitness backgrounds learn from each other's strengths—and typically at a faster rate than adults. We have found over the last year that a large, diverse body of experience and the ability to learn quickly create an environment in which student weaknesses are improved at an accelerated rate.

We started an advanced class at our middle school in January, with 22 students and two teachers who are CrossFit Kids trainers. These kids brought diverse fitness and athletic backgrounds to the group, but 30 percent had little or no fitness or sports experience. None of these students had been doing CrossFit for more than six months. By the end of the school year, each member of the class could do butterfly pull-ups, handstand push-ups and Olympic lifts with proficiency.

To mark how far members of this group had come during their first year of training, we had them participate in the Teen Gauntlet. It was an amazing experience. Five of our advanced CrossFit students competed, and all five finished in the top 20 in their age group. Josh Kelley won his age category and was invited to the Kids Gauntlet at the CrossFit Games.



Teachers found that improvement was very rapid as students who struggled with movements learned from those who were proficient.

I attribute most of our success this year with CrossFit Kids to having fantastic instructors who have bought into the CrossFit Kids methodology and live it every day, and I think all teachers in all subjects could benefit from becoming CrossFit trainers.

"Differentiated instruction," "higher level thinking" and "learning styles" are all catch phrases in education right now. CrossFit Kids seminars not only address all the principles behind these phrases but also teach educators how to apply the principles.

Encouraging learning based on teaching cues and student engagement sets CrossFit Kids apart as an educational model.

Using these ideals is referred to as "best practices" in education. One of the most difficult things about teaching is trying to figure how to implement these best practices in the classroom. The CrossFit Kids program is, in fact, set up just like a classroom based on best practices, and encouraging learning based on teaching cues and student engagement sets CrossFit Kids apart as an educational model.

What we were not necessarily expecting to see was CrossFit Kids providing a reordering of the physical pecking order in gym class. Our school is located in an area in which football reigns supreme: Georgia is in the heart of college football's Southeastern Conference. We love football, and we think of large, powerful bodies when we think of "athletes."

CrossFit Kids and the CrossFit program as a whole punish any specialization to excess, which is why we have slightly built tennis athletes who are more than holding their own in CrossFit workouts with large, powerful and physically dominant football players. What I think I see as a result is that the larger students begin to see the limits of their ability and appreciate other abilities. Strength alone, for instance, is not enough. In that process of discovering strengths and weaknesses, our athletes, through CrossFit Kids, are finding they can admire the work of those traditionally considered "less talented" just as much as the work

of those regarded as "most talented" in P.E. classes. This has been a welcome but unexpected result.

Some have been fearful that a CrossFit Kids implementation would create a hyper-competitive environment that might exacerbate the exclusion of the less athletic students. My experience was the opposite: as my kids were counting each other's reps and had the chance to cheer for success, they became more equal.

The Future of P.E.

All these elements of our kindergarden-to-Grade-12 CrossFit journey have shown me that CrossFit Kids can save physical education.

As we all know, today's physical-education programs are widely ineffective because of a lack of student involvement and engagement, discipline issues, and a lack of value in the eyes of students and administrators. These issues feed off of one another to the detriment of fitness.



CrossFit does not reward size and strength alone, which means smaller athletes can compete against the larger football players.



When the teachers and administrators at Savannah Christian got excited about P.E., the kids did too.

Case in point: to address the lack of student involvement, dancing-style video games and parachute games have become mainstays in physical-education programs, but neither will significantly improve fitness, though they might be considered better than nothing. Still, their inclusion in a fitness program leads administrators, as well as students, to view the P.E. classes as low in impact and of little importance. P.E. then becomes little more than a babysitting service, and the schedule makers place more students in P.E. not because students want to be there but because it's an easy class. This leads to increased discipline issues and less student involvement. The factors in total create a reinforcing loop that's difficult to interrupt.

What we have seen with our CrossFit Kids implementation is that kids recognize the value in the program and, just as they do in math or English, they treat their P.E. time like it matters. Interestingly, functional movement is possibly the only thing you can learn in school that you will utilize every day for the rest of your life. It is something that can be

taught, improved and measured, just like the curriculum aspects of any other class, and functional movement could be applied to meet any state standards.

Because the functional movements of CrossFit Kids can create instant value in the eyes of students and administrators, I believe it will change how P.E. is viewed wherever CrossFit Kids is successfully implemented.

This has been an eye-opening year. CrossFit Kids has changed the attitude toward physical education and has improved the expectation of what it can do for students at Savannah Christian Preparatory School. Our kids have learned things like goal setting and how to deal with adversity, which they can now apply not only in the traditional classroom but also in every aspect of their lives. We have students who have found new strengths and are beginning to realize that their potential is limitless—and this is just year one.

We are excited about where we are headed and what the future may hold.



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About the Author

Chris Spurlock is an assistant principal, baseball coach, husband and soon-to-be father of three. He has a passion for athletics, and he completely changed his body after doing CrossFit for only 11 months. He considers being part of bringing CrossFit Kids into classrooms one of the most exciting things he's had the privilege of doing.