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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

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## Facebook or Fitness?

Saratoga High School replaced standard P.E. with CrossFit, and while all kids might not like putting in the effort, most report that they're seeing great results.

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By Peter Jordan CrossFit Sawmill

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"Be not afraid of fitness: some are born fit, some achieve fitness and some have CrossFit thrust upon them."

—William Shakespeare (more or less)

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Saratoga High School in Saratoga, Calif, is the home of CrossFit Sawmill. We are, as far as we know, the only comprehensive public high school that not only offers CrossFit classes to our students but also offers no alternative. All our physical fitness (formerly physical education) classes are based on CrossFit principles and are taught by certified CrossFit instructors. We have 10 sections of Beginning Physical Fitness throughout the school day, and our facility is used extensively by athletes in our after-school sports programs, as well as by groups of teachers and school staff—all under the supervision of our instructors.

One thing that makes our affiliate unique is our clients do not pay to be here; they are compelled to be here. Students must earn 20 units of physical education credit (the equivalent of four semesters) to graduate. You can earn credits if you are a member of the marching band, and you can earn credits for playing sports after school. But if you are not a musician or an athlete, as of this year you are a CrossFitter.

So what does the average 15-year-old think about that?

*"Another year of PE would kill me. Next year I'm taking track."*

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**"I hate this physical education class because it takes away time from my awesome life. One example is facebook and other shit."**

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***At Saratoga High School, you don't go to P.E. You go to CrossFit.***



**While some kids would prefer a game of dodgeball, others are seeing the benefits of a more intense approach to fitness.**

### Survey Says ...

In March, midway through our second semester of implementation, we surveyed 227 freshmen and sophomore students about fitness in general, CrossFit in particular, and how the "new P.E." compares to the "old P.E."

*"The new P.E. class is extremely unenjoyable. P.E. to most students is a class where students should have fun playing games, such as Capture the Flag and Dodgeball. It would be much better for students to have the previous, relaxing, and more fun P.E. curriculum."*

On the other hand:

*"This class is a refreshing break from the classes I have taken in the past, where the focus is not particularly on strength, but on skills in different sports. I really enjoyed this class and would love to take it again."*

*"This class is new to me. I can at least do something rather than nothing like the old P.E."*

*"It's a lot better than the old program even if we do a lot of groaning."*

Most students agree on some things. Fully 86 percent of respondents agree that the new class is challenging, and over 90 percent agree that it is tiring:

*"The workouts are tiring ..."*

*"Very tiring."*

*"Horribly tiring."*

*"UGHHHHH SO TIRING."*

Despite this, or because of it, 86.2 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, "I am stronger."

*"It is very effective. I have really noticed improvements in terms of flexibility and muscle."*

*"It is really fun and I like going to PE, and at the end of the period I am in fact tired and I am improving day by day."*

*"It's really annoying and hard but it's good and makes you stronger..."*





*If you had taken CrossFit in school, where would your fitness level be today?*

In addition to being stronger, many students also reported being faster (62.1 percent), more flexible (38.9 percent), more agile (35 percent) and more knowledgeable (33 percent). Many report that they think more about what they eat (32 percent), and a significant number report sleeping better (24.6 percent) and improved ability to focus in school (24.1 percent).

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**“It is very effective. I have really noticed improvements in terms of flexibility and muscle.”**

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Students were asked to rate the effectiveness of various elements of our daily routine. The WOD received the

highest rating (48.7 percent said it was very effective; 32.6 percent said it was somewhat effective), followed by games. The element that was rated least effective was the reflection. At the end of every class we take a few minutes to have students record the times, loads, reps, etc. and to write a few words about how they feel, how they are progressing or anything else related to fitness.

*“I don’t see the point in the reflections we do at the end of class ... I think it is a waste of time because we are not going to need to know what we did on a certain day and I don’t think it benefits us at all.”*

*“Reflections are stupid.”*

*“The reflections are useless and a waste of time.”*

For the teacher, the reflections are enlightening and reassuring:

*“I did a pull-up today! I was so happy!”*

*“Yesterday when I had to pick up my hairbrush, instead of bending with my back, I did the gorilla squat. I liked how we were working out, but it was still fun—not painfully boring.”*

*"I ran with (my friend) in the beginning but towards the second lap, she walked and I kept running. I was not as sore/weak as usual. I was quite proud of myself!"*

*"OMG! One of the first ones to finish the workout ... pretty impressive, I'm glad (my friend) pushed me to work harder otherwise I'd probably have walked the whole time feeling negative. Backpack cleans in the quad were interesting, I'm glad I always keep my bag light."*

*"I'm noticing changes in my calves. They are becoming stronger. I slept a lot more last night."*

*"I like this workout. I feel healthy yet not tired. That's weird I guess."*

Meet the generation for whom feeling healthy is "weird":

*"Okay, so I get how this is supposed to get us fit or whatever but really being physically fit is a choice not a requirement. This class is stupid, for several hours a week I could have been studying for my SATs because Stanford is going to choose me for that and not for my physical fitness. This class is a complete waste of my time, I don't need a knowitall teacher telling me what to do in order to take care of my body. If I want to be physically fit I'll do it on my own time, maybe when I'm older. Right now I need to focus on my future, not on my body. Thanks."*

*"I hate this physical education class because it takes away time from my awesome life. One example is facebook and other shit."*

Clearly, the jury is still out on the new P.E. Of the sophomores who took the old class last year and the new one this year, 63.5 percent would prefer that we go back to rolling out the balls. Of 80 free-response comments, about half of them were negative. The good news is about half of them were not. And almost all our students are getting tired on a regular basis, almost all of them are feeling stronger, and many are feeling a weird sensation called "fitness." We are confident that we would not be able to accomplish this with the "previous, relaxing, and more fun P.E. curriculum."

To see the complete survey results, go to the Teacher Resource page at [CrossFitSawmill.com](http://CrossFitSawmill.com).



#### **About the Author**

*Peter Jordan is the Saratoga High School athletic director and physical-education department chair, and part owner and operator of CrossFit Sawmill, along with fellow P.E. teachers Rick Ellis, Tim Lugo and Yuko Aoki.*