

## Going the Extra Mile in the Fight against Heart Disease and Stroke

Every year, close to 30,000 schools across the nation join in the fight against heart disease and stroke! Every school does their part in saving lives for the American Heart Association through Jump Rope for Heart and Hoops for Heart. But, some schools really do go the extra mile in the fight! We are blessed to have a few of those schools here in New Mexico! In this article, I will highlight a few of these schools who have inspired me to step up the game in my fight against heart disease and stroke!

### Bernalillo Middle School

This will be the 2<sup>nd</sup> year that Bernalillo Middle School has participated in Jump Rope for Heart or Hoops for Heart. Led by their home economics teacher, Sandy Vigil-Varela, this school continues to amaze me with how they go above and beyond.

Last year, they raised \$1,007.20 and their goal for their Jump Rope for Heart day was to have SOMEONE jumping EVERY minute of the day! The kids filtered in and out, taking their elective course time to participate in the jumping activities. They had a great turnout and the kids had a wonderful, heart healthy day!

In addition, Sandy's sewing club made a dozen beautiful heart pillows for Lovelace hospital's heart patients. These are very firm pillows with an important purpose. Heart patients use them to press against their chests after receiving heart surgery. The kids took a bus from Bernalillo to Lovelace Hospital and presented the pillows to the doctors, nurses and even some patients from the cardiac unit!

Sandy's plan for this year is to do a combined event of Jump Rope for Heart and Hoops for Heart. She plans for the event to be even bigger this year, using BOTH of Bernalillo Middle School's gyms: one for basketball activities and one for jump roping. She kicked everything off with an assembly, with not only a survivor to speak and tell the kids about their experience with heart disease and stroke, but also, she asked the top fundraiser from last year to say a few words to inspire the kids. She is also starting the idea of a "heart chain" this year. Each child that brings in \$25 gets to add a link to the heart chain. She is hoping that by the end of their event, the chain will run entirely through the walls of the school!

### The Montessori Elementary School

This is the first year that The Montessori Elementary School has participated in Jump Rope for Heart! The school recently became a charter school, as part of APS. The school is approximately 300 kids from Kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I am SO excited to work with them, as they have a strong philosophy of reaching out and helping the community! Led by Kim Keller-Box, they are kicking off their event in a few weeks!

For the kick off, Kim has asked a teacher who recently had a heart attack to speak at the kick off assembly. In addition, the Manzano Day School Red Hot Peppers will perform

to motivate the kids to jump rope to keep heart-healthy! The school has set a fundraising goal of \$50 per child. We call this the “life-saver” level. It costs AHA \$50 to teach someone CPR. Their goal is to have a school full of life-savers!

To wrap up their event, Kim has decided to incorporate a “mix it up” idea. They will bring in a combination of grade levels to jump together, so that the kids can learn from each other!

One unique quality of the school is their focus on music and art. Each child and their parents participate in weekly Suzuki violin lessons. The school has contacted the Heart Hospital in Albuquerque and has set up a concert done by the children for the families of heart patients and the staff! In addition, in art classes, they all made Valentine cards and have arranged for each patient to get a card on their breakfast tray on the morning of Valentine’s Day!

Subway Restaurants has started a program called “Random Acts of Fitness”. These kits are given to schools who want to incorporate more fitness into the every day classroom environment. The Montessori Elementary School was chosen as one of the schools to receive these kits. They have been distributed and the teachers are already going online to register their classrooms!

### **Griegos Elementary School**

Griegos Elementary School returned to the Jump Rope for Heart scene last year, after taking a 5 year break. Amazingly, the kids picked back up right where they left off! They raised a whopping \$2,755.61 last year under PE teacher, Barbara Hunt! Their Jump Rope for Heart event is being kicked off the first week of February. This year, led by PE teacher Amy Suman, they have even bigger ideas!! The teachers are taking GIANT strides in the fight!!

Last year, as a parent volunteer, Amy started a walking club after school with the teachers. They simply met on the track, some with a stroller in tow, and simply worked out with resistance bands and walked together! Little by little, they added some weights and mats, sometimes through their own funding! They met once a week over the summer and motivated each other to keep up with the program!

Their group of participants continued to grow, once school got started in the fall. Currently, they have 18 teachers who work out 3 afternoons per week together for an hour. This represents over 50% of their teacher population! They are very fortunate to have an after school program located at the school, where the kids can hang out during the adult’s work out time.

Through the support of the other teachers, and the unparalleled energy and enthusiasm Amy puts forth, they are losing weight and keeping themselves heart healthy! They are also participating in Albuquerque Public School’s Wellness Challenge. In addition,

Griegos Elementary School was another school that was chosen to receive the Subway “Random Acts of Fitness” kits.

Bernalillo Middle School, The Montessori Elementary School and Griegos Elementary School consider Jump Rope for Heart more than just a yearly fundraiser where the kids can earn thank you gifts. They all have one thing in common. They embrace healthy living and helping others as part of their mission! I am blessed to be able to work with them, and I hope the stories of how they are taking their efforts to the next level have inspired you, as they have inspired me! Every school counts, every dollar makes a difference! Happy 30<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Jump Rope for Heart!!