

HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (HEPA)
+
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)



Zhang Sah

Philadelphia, Pa.

approx.

300

Average number of students served during the school year

60%

Students from low-income families

Main funding sources:

- ▶ City of Philadelphia Department of Human Services Out-of-School Time
- ▶ Child Care Subsidy (CCIS)
- ▶ Parent fees

Embracing the complementary nature of healthy eating and physical activity and social and emotional learning

Taking a comprehensive approach to wellness—which includes healthy eating and physical activity and extends to additional aspects of health, such as social and emotional skills and competencies—can provide the necessary supports to help healthy children grow into healthy adults. Afterschool and summer learning programs are well-situated to be a component of solutions that address the whole child. Children in quality programs have access to healthy snacks and meals, take part in physical activities, feel safe and supported by caring mentors, work collaboratively with peers, develop new skills, and gain confidence as they learn to set goals and make responsible decisions for themselves.

Overview

Zhang Sah takes a comprehensive positive-outcome approach to its programming, combining martial arts with developing students' social and emotional skills and competencies. Meaning "brave scholar" in Korean, Zhang Sah's elementary and middle school students learn martial arts while applying the program's core tenets: benevolence, courtesy, humility, indomitable spirit, integrity, perseverance, self-control, and stewardship.

A typical day for students

After dismissal from school, children arrive at Zhang Sah and receive a nutritious snack. After their snack, students transition into martial arts. Students practice social and emotional skills and competencies throughout their martial arts practice by working on self-control, discipline, self-awareness, and perseverance. Zhang Sah instructors begin classes by teaching technique and form, but it is largely dependent upon students' age and skill level. Time is reserved for students to practice with one another, where students are encouraged to support and cheer one another on. Additionally, the program provides homework help, arts and crafts, and other sports and activities.

Outcomes

A three-year longitudinal study of the program found that a majority of Zhang Sah students fell within or performed above the healthy fitness zone in a number of fitness domains, including flexibility (100 percent), back core strength (95 percent), and frontal core strength (60 percent). The study also reported that

students increased their ability to empathize with others, exhibited the ability to form positive relationships with others, and showed gains related to their sense of confidence.

Program characteristics

Zhang Sah's approach to its programming is through an assets-based framework. The program offers students holistic programming combining martial arts, positive youth development, and education. This includes a focus on providing positive supports that are external, such as employing instructors who serve as mentors and role models for students, and internal supports, including working with students on building their self-confidence and resilience.

Curricula is scaffolded based on age and aligned with "competency outcomes" in the areas of social and emotional skills and competencies, fitness, and grades. For instance, students ages four through seven are placed in a pre-martial arts class, where they practice listening, focusing, and working cooperatively. Older youth build on the aforementioned skills as they are introduced to new martial arts forms. The program connects the values and skills from martial arts with students' real-life challenges, making the lessons learned relevant to students' lives and empowering students to take ownership of their experiences in and out of the program.

Program history

Founded in 1995, Zhang Sah transitioned into a nonprofit martial arts program in 1998 with the mission to educate the body and strengthen the mind. Due to early popularity, Zhang Sah evolved into a comprehensive program incorporating martial arts with project-based learning. In 2003, the program was the first martial arts program to be accredited by the National AfterSchool Association. In 2014, Zhang Sah joined Sports for Juvenile Justice, a collaboration between groups including the U.S. Attorney's Office Eastern District of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia Family Court.

Recommendations

for embracing the complementary nature of HEPA and SEL:

- ▶ Afterschool is a unique space that can address youth development with a multifaceted approach.
- ▶ Develop intentional curriculum incorporating youth development principles that are relevant to specific age groups.



Challenges

National public health issues among children today are physical, and social, and emotional. The National Survey of Children's Health found that close to 1 in 3 children are overweight or obese, placing them at a higher likelihood for a number of health issues including asthma and high blood pressure. Additionally, 45 percent of children in the U.S. have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE), which has been linked to negative health outcomes and behaviors.

There are linkages between children's physical and social and emotional health. While one does not automatically lead to the other, research has found that children who are obese are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety, and studies have shown the association between ACEs and a higher likelihood of being overweight and obese.

Issues in childhood have long reaching effects. ACEs have been linked to negative health issues in adulthood, such as a higher likelihood of drug abuse and heart disease, and obesity in childhood has been associated with a higher likelihood of obesity in adulthood. At a national level, the estimated lifetime economic costs of ACEs are \$124 billion and obesity is \$150 billion.

Read [A Big-Picture Approach to Wellness: Afterschool Supporting Strong Bodies and Minds](#) to learn more.