

BY KELLY ST. JOHN REGIER



Well-rounded wellness

Fusion Academy Huntington Beach takes a holistic approach to teens' weight issues.

Public health officials have sounded the alarm on rising rates of childhood obesity. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that 17 percent of children have a body mass index in the 95th percentile, which is considered overweight. It also finds that an additional 34 percent of children are considered 'at risk' for obesity due to lifestyle factors.

Schools across the nation are working to address rising rates of childhood obesity, from removing onsite vending machines peddling soda and junk food to increasing opportunities for kids to be active both at recess and in physical education classes. Educators are teaching healthy eating habits through programs such as community gardening, while PTAs support the effort by promoting events such as 'Walk to School' days. Many schools have passed policies limiting

sugary snacks, even birthday cupcakes.

In Huntington Beach, one private school is addressing children's weight and health with a different approach – helping students deal with their emotions around food, as well as promoting healthy eating and an active lifestyle.

Fusion Academy Huntington Beach is an alternative private school that offers one-to-one classes and flexible scheduling for students in grades 5-12.

Fusion recently developed and introduced its Wellness Program, which uses a balanced plan to improve students' health and attitude toward food and body image.

"We really take the holistic approach," says Maryam Pourmohsen, of Fusion. "It's not a temporary fix, but [it's] what we can do to make it a permanent lifestyle change. So many teens have an

inaccurate, distorted self-image. Most of the time they're not even obese, but the image they have of themselves is wrong. And lack of self-esteem often leads to binge eating."

Fusion Academy has nine campuses across California, including another Orange County school, in Mission Viejo. Pourmohsen says that Fusion developed its Wellness Program in response to the needs of its students.

"It's a huge need across all of our Fusion campuses," Pourmohsen says. "Students have their issues with eating disorders or a lack of exercise. We want to empower them."

Fusion Academy's Huntington Beach wellness classes are held on Fridays, as a five-week session of four hours each day. Students spend one hour each with a teacher in one of four assigned subject



areas: art expression, music expression, healthy habits and physical wellness.

Because all of Fusion's classes are taught in a one-on-one format, teachers act as mentors and tailor a curriculum specific to a student's needs, whether it's exploring how art and music could help them reduce stress or helping a student with an eating disorder to develop a healthy self-image.

The goal is that, by the end of the five-week session, "students are really prepared to make a life change for themselves," Pourmohsen says.

Sometimes that change can mean helping students find a physical activity that they can enjoy. Many Fusion students partake in board sports such as surfing and skateboarding, while dance is popular among girls, Pourmohsen says.

"Our biggest thing is to try to do something fun, that

they enjoy, and that they will continue even after the class is over," she says.

As with other Fusion courses, the Wellness Program is available not only to its full-time students but also to part-time students, such as homeschoolers who want to supplement their education; students who need to add scholastic credits; or students who want more tutoring and one-to-one mentoring.

The school also attracts students who want to round out their educational experience with art and music, as Fusion has a mixed-media art studio and state-of-the-art recording studio. Each class costs \$2,150 per session.

The Wellness Program has ongoing enrollment, and students can sign up this summer or during the school year. Fusion is WASC accredited, and the course offers elective credit. fusionacademy.com

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