

The positive impact of athletics

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Organized athletics have been around since at least 776 BC, when people competed in the Ancient Olympic Games. While much of society has evolved in the past 2,700 years, people still enjoy participating and watching athletic events daily. In recent years, the amount of physical activity per day in both adults and children has decreased, which has led to more health risks. The CDC currently recommends that adolescents engage in 60 minutes of physical activity daily (they recommend 150 minutes a week for adults).

At Laconia Middle School, students in their formative years are introduced to a variety of sports through physical education during their school day. Some of the skills and sports that are targeted include ultimate Frisbee, cricket, floor hockey, flag football and quarterly fitness testing. The physical education department is also now teaching a physical fitness course, which uses the equipment and space in the newly renovated weight room and fitness lab. LMS students also have the opportunity to play on school

sports teams, which offer a plethora of benefits. Team sports offered include boys soccer, girls soccer, field hockey, volleyball, football and cross country in the fall. During the winter months, students participate in boys' basketball, girls' basketball, unified basketball teams and cheerleading. Baseball, softball, track and field, and unified soccer are played in the spring at LMS.

Students who play on a sports team learn collaboration, teamwork, perseverance and communication skills. Especially during the transitional middle school years, being part of a team allows students to feel like they belong and holds them accountable for their actions. Playing a sport helps young adults build camaraderie with their schoolmates and helps them develop higher self-esteem.

This year's theme at LMS has been "Get Moving!" All staff members were challenged to create a fitness goal for themselves for the school year. Each staff member has a fitness buddy to check in with periodically as to how they are meeting their goal. At different points of the year, students have even been encouraged to challenge staff members to fitness competitions; there have been push-up, sit-up, burpee and wall-sit challenges between students and staff. It has been a great way for the students to connect with one of their teachers or even an administrator!

LMS physical education teacher and unified basketball coach Kate Hohenberger explains the importance of exposing students to fitness: "Physical fitness is lifelong! Exposing kids to physical fitness is important because it shows them how to be active as an individual. Learning about new activities like weight training, yoga, and dance can help students find activities they enjoy doing and would possibly do later in life".

With obesity rates at an all-time high, playing a sport gets young adults moving and focused on being fit. While screen time is a favorite past time for so many teens, playing a sport gives students a structured activity that engages them with their peers and coaches, who serve as positive adult role models. Video games and social media are a time-consuming drain on impressionable young adults, that are usually engaged in during times where they could be being active with peers and learning new skills. Sports get kids moving, build confidence and creates the lifetime skill of working together to achieve a common goal.

Participating in athletics as a youth can also lead to healthier lifestyle as an adult. Studies have shown that adults who played sports while growing up are more apt to continue being physically active as they grow older, lowering their chances of developing long-term health risks such as obesity, high blood pressure or diabetes.

According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, youth sports participation also reduces the likelihood that teens will eventually drop out of school and increases their chances of attending college.

While recreation sports teams sometimes subscribe to an “everyone receives a trophy” mentality, at the middle school level students do not all make the team and teams do not always win. Students learn in a safe environment how to cope with losing and not being the best. Every athlete plays during each competition, but playing time may not be equal, for a variety of reasons. While this is a challenging reality for players and parents, it motivates the most committed athletes to spend their own time practicing to improve their skills and earn more playing time.

Perhaps we could all benefit from putting down our devices, getting outside and engaging in some physical activity. While you are out, you may even come across the cross-country team running together through town, or see one of our other outdoor teams practicing at Smith or Opeeche Fields. All regular season LMS athletic events are free of charge for spectators and their schedules can be found on the LMS website, <http://lmslaconia.weebly.com/>. If you can find the time, please come support our youth in a fun and positive environment.

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