

**WHEN ARE
WE GOING
TO TEACH
HEALTH?**

**LET'S TEACH HEALTH AS IF EACH CHILD'S
LIFE DEPENDS ON IT—BECAUSE IT DOES**

DUNCAN VAN DUSEN



LIONCREST
PUBLISHING

COPYRIGHT © 2020 DUNCAN VAN DUSEN

All rights reserved.

WHEN ARE WE GOING TO TEACH HEALTH?

Let's Teach Health as If Each Child's Life

Depends on It - Because It Does

ISBN 978-1-5445-1713-1 *Hardcover*

978-1-5445-0761-3 *Paperback*

978-1-5445-0762-0 *Ebook*

CONTENTS

PART I: WHY?

- 1. WHAT THIS BOOK IS (AND WHAT IT ISN'T) 15
- 2. PUBLIC EDUCATION AND PUBLIC HEALTH 23
 - CASE STUDY: LAWMAKERS IN ACTION 29
- 3. HEALTHY KIDS LEARN BETTER 35
 - CASE STUDY: PRINCIPAL IN ACTION 47
- 4. BARRIERS TO TEACHING HEALTH 55

PART II: WHAT?

- 5. THE RECIPE FOR EFFECTIVE HEALTH EDUCATION 63
 - CASE STUDY: PARENTS IN ACTION 81
- 6. SCHOOL CULTURE: KIDS VALUE WHAT WE DO, NOT WHAT WE SAY 91
 - CASE STUDY: DISTRICT IN ACTION 105
 - ACTIVITY BREAK 117

PART III: HOW?

- 7. TOBACCO AVOIDANCE: DEFUSING THE E-CIGARETTE EXPLOSION 121
 - CASE STUDY: STUDENT IN ACTION 139
- 8. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: MAXIMIZING THE TIME WE ALREADY HAVE 147
 - CASE STUDY: TEACHERS IN ACTION 161
- 9. CELEBRATING NUTRITION: INVOLVING EVERYONE IS FREE AND FUN ... 167
 - CASE STUDY: FOOD SERVICE IN ACTION 179
- 10. CATCH®: DOING GOOD, SCALING GREAT 189

PART IV: WHEN?

- 11. "WHEN AM I GOING TO USE THIS?" 203

APPENDIX

- SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED ACTIONS BY ACTOR 211
- GLOSSARY 217
- ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 221
- ABOUT THE AUTHOR 223
- NOTES & SOURCES FOR FURTHER READING 225

CASE STUDY

Principal in Action—Solomon P. Ortiz Elementary School, Brownsville, Texas

A Texas principal credits her school's top academic standing to a focus on teaching health.

Ortiz Elementary sits at the southernmost tip of Texas in Brownsville, just six thousand feet from the Rio Grande and the U.S. border with Mexico. Its students are virtually all low income (92 percent) as measured by their eligibility for federal free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) assistance. As is unfortunately typical of such low-income areas, the community bears a high burden of obesity and diabetes.¹

The region around Brownsville has grown rapidly since the passage of NAFTA in 1994, becoming a major automotive manufacturing and transportation hub. Like many Texas border towns, Brownsville is dwarfed by a neighbor city across the bridge in Mexico, Matamoros,

with triple its population. The combined metropolitan areas of these two cities include approximately 1.5 million people—about the size of Jacksonville or Milwaukee.

Brownsville’s population is overwhelmingly Hispanic and follows many Latino food, holiday, social, and cultural traditions. According to the 2010 Census, Brownsville’s per-capita income of \$10,960 was the third lowest of the 276 largest cities in the United States—but it was ranked as the safest of 24 Texas cities included in the FBI’s 2013 Uniform Crime Reports.²

Ortiz might be expected to be a low-performing school based on the disconcerting correlation between lower incomes and lower academic performance in Texas public schools. This association is clearly visible when FRL eligibility is compared with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) Accountability Rating system, which grades three measures of academic success from “A” to “F” (see figure 3, using a standard 4.0 GPA scale).³

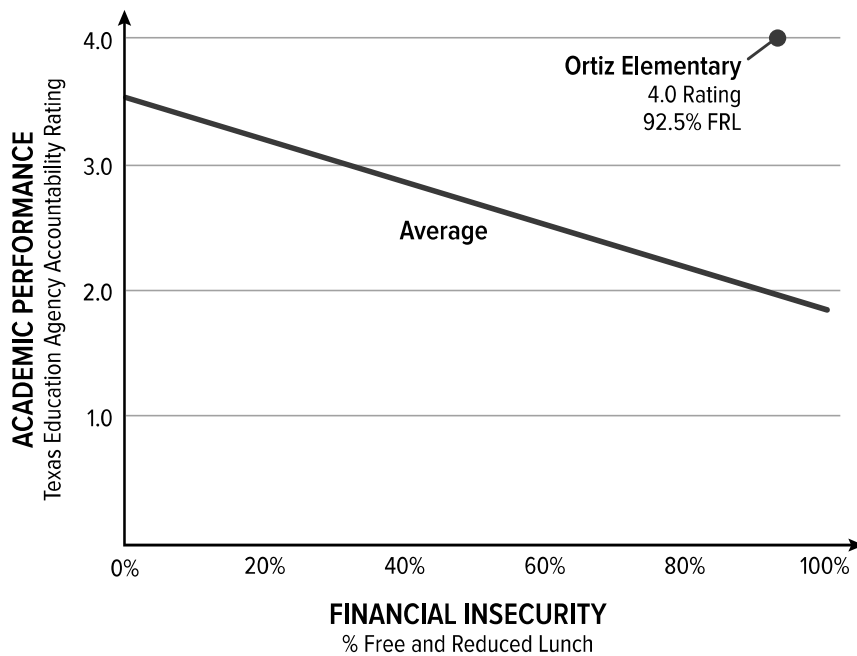


Figure 3: Correlation between Economic Status and School Ratings among Texas Public Schools

Beating the Educational Odds

Yet Ortiz has managed to beat these long educational odds. It was:

- among only 6 percent of Texas public schools that earned the equivalent of a 4.0 GPA in the 2018–2019 TEA Accountability Rating,⁴ which considers a variety of indicators, such as graduation rates, college, career, and military readiness, SAT/ACT scores, and college prep course completion
- among only 30 schools statewide (0.05 percent of Texas public schools) with 92 percent or higher FRL eligibility that earned a 4.0 Accountability Rating that year
- 1 of 11 schools recognized by the TEA as a High Performing and High Progress Title 1 School in 2014–2015⁵

- 1 of 15 schools nationally to win the National Center for Urban School Transformation’s America’s Best Urban Schools Award in both 2015 and 2018⁶

How did they do it?

Personal and Community Involvement in Promoting a Culture of Health

To hear Principal Patricia Garza answer this question is to listen to a passionate testimonial on the educational and redemptive power of a culture of health. “Ortiz looks at the whole child, not just their brains,” she says. “When kids can also use their bodies to excel, that gives them confidence in the classroom, transforming them through higher self-esteem and respect from peers and teachers.”

Before serving as principal, Garza was Ortiz’s dean of instruction and pushed hard to increase the schools’ academic rigor. She developed clearer and more demanding expectations of students in the primary grades, especially in reading and writing. She also observed closely what holds kids back, which led her to guide Ortiz in integrating special-needs kids into classes with their peers and increasing opportunities for all kids to participate in physical activity and other health behaviors.

Garza’s entire staff of teachers, administrators, and other professionals reports to school at 7:30 a.m. each weekday so they can supervise a variety of before-school

activities. The most popular is a running and fitness club with an average daily attendance of 230 kids—almost half the student body! Garza set the club in motion by enlisting an enthusiastic teacher, whose positivity was contagious among students. As the club grew, the school occasionally had to cap participation to sustain a safe staff-to-student ratio. Responding to the demand, parents and other community members quickly signed on as volunteers, and Garza redeployed paraprofessionals to help out as well. This all-hands approach ensured that the club could stay open to all without adding a penny to the school's budget.

Among the club's many benefits is that vigorous activity before school helps kids get settled for a day of learning. In particular, the club has enabled a large population of students diagnosed with ADHD to manage their condition with minimal or no medication. Garza has observed that kids who previously couldn't stay in their seats have greatly improved their concentration and, as a result, their grades.

She also ensured that Ortiz Elementary takes full advantage of the lunchroom as a health-education classroom. Students in kindergarten through second grade enjoy special cafeteria tours, and all students are served nutritious snacks that rotate with the seasons. Along the way, they learn about the negative effects of food processing and added sugar and salt, among other topics. In the cafeteria and elsewhere, the school environment surrounds students with health information, including posters fea-

turing the simple and memorable GO-SLOW-WHOA food classification system (see chapter 9).

So important is the lunchroom to the school culture that Principal Garza takes a cafeteria shift every day. She greets cafeteria workers, thanking them for their efforts to keep kids healthy, and talks to students about what they're eating, why it is (or isn't) a healthy choice, and what their favorite fruits and vegetables are. She also seats herself where everyone can watch her eat her own healthy lunch—Social Cognitive Theory in action! (See chapter 5.)

At Ortiz, health is a team sport. The school has a wellness team that meets once per six-week grading period (see chapter 6) and recruits additional players from the community by engaging parents in its health programming. Garza says that many of these parents tell her they want to provide a healthier environment for their kids, but lack education in how to do so—especially on a tight budget. She has made bridging that knowledge and skill gap a key part of Ortiz's mission, regularly sending health messages home with students and organizing health-oriented parent events and programs.

For example, each year Ortiz holds a very well-attended “Family Fun Night” that offers healthy foods and physical activities parents can enjoy with their kids. The school also had the kids create and wear “heavenly hats” as tributes to people fighting cancer in a parade the school staged as a cancer-awareness event. It drew enthusias-

tic participation from both students and parents, and the entry fees (one dollar per hat) were donated to local cancer patients.

One important attribute all these student health initiatives have in common: they drain little, if any, extra money from the school budget. Principal Garza resourcefully deployed her own and her staff's existing time, selected activities that could be done with existing equipment, and marshalled contributions of volunteer time and materials from the community. Garza cultivated this involvement by creatively recognizing exceptional volunteers. For example, in 2018 she thanked them in a special ceremony complete with students dressed up as cheerleaders.



Students welcome top parent and staff volunteers during a recognition ceremony (Photograph by Brownsville ISD. Used with permission. Full video at <https://youtu.be/6u17yo2ou2Y>.)

A Word to the Wise

Is there really a connection between Ortiz's prioritizing Whole Child health and its students' academic success?

Garza has no doubt: “Absolutely!” Her closing advice to other principals:

If you are analyzing how to improve your school’s performance, look at the bottom kids and consider whether better health could help them. If you say you don’t have time to teach health, you are not using your time efficiently, because health may, in fact, be the solution you are looking for.