

Students + Snowshoes = Outdoor Fun



Three 6th Graders venture out on the new snowshoes.

PS4H funding helps New York Mills students enjoy outdoor PE

Minnesota's notorious winters make it difficult for residents to engage in outdoor physical activity. This is especially true for school-age children, who often rely on limited indoor physical education (PE) time to get their daily dose of exercise. But sometimes all it takes is a chance to try a fun new outdoor activity to get students moving again, even when it's cold.

Jeff Rimpila, a New York Mills elementary PE teacher, discovered this after working with PartnerSHIP 4 Health (PS4H) to purchase snowshoes for his 5th and 6th grade physical education classes. With the help of Karen Nitzkowski he was able to secure 36 pairs, and used the opportunity to organize 50-minute extended recess periods for the big debut. Over the course of four days, roughly 30 students per day had the chance to try snowshoeing, many for the first time. The verdict? Rimpila reports that it was an instant hit, with students commenting on how cool and fun it was to get around by snowshoe. They were amazed at how easily they could stay on top of the snow, and viewed it as a team effort, helping one another get set up

with the unfamiliar equipment. A group of 6th graders even organized their own impromptu snowshoe race. In the words of one appreciative student, "I can't wait to get outside and snowshoe—I have always wanted to, but never had the opportunity."

Early success leads to ambitious future plans

New York Mills has big plans for the snowshoes going forward. They hope to also use them with 7th–9th grade PE students and offer them as part of an elective course for students in 10th–12th grade. Their ambitions even extend beyond the school day, with an effort in the works to create a Saturday Community Education course that would take advantage of this valuable new resource. Rimpila's experience so far has already yielded some valuable lessons, including the need for an equipment cart to keep the many pairs of snowshoes organized, reducing the amount of PE time devoted to setup instead of fun and movement.

New York Mills provides a great example of how creating new and unique experiences encourages year-round physical activity. Sometimes all it takes is a little creativity to change how students view exercise and movement, even during a Minnesota winter.

Learn more about PartnerSHIP 4 Health's work in Becker, Clay, Otter Tail and Wilkin counties at <http://partnership4health.org>

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