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## **New London students find fun in getting and staying fit**

By [Judy Benson](#) Day Staff Writer - Article published Feb 12, 2011

### **Magnet school fifth-graders enjoy high-energy workouts**

**New London** - After 28 minutes of punching the air, spinning on their bottoms, snaking arms overhead and stomping the floor to the driving pop rhythms emanating from the boom box in the corner, the 80 fifth-graders at the Regional Multicultural Magnet School proved that exercise doesn't have to be about drudgery or competition.

"It was really fun," said Hannah Welch of North Stonington, winded but smiling as she and her classmates prepared to leave the gymnasium after the Friday morning workout. When the dancing first started, she admitted, she felt self-conscious, but her reluctance soon faded into the beat of "All the Right Moves" by OneRepublic, "Just a Dream" by Nelly and other tunes.

"It was good, pretty easy," added Jason Rivera of New London, who said he liked the air punching and karate-style kicking moves the best.

Leading the students in the high-energy dance routine was Kim Thibodeau, trainer and instructor for the Recess Rocks! program that visited the school this week as part of its annual health fair. Earlier in the week, Thibodeau led classes of third- and fourth-graders in similar workouts.

"How much exercise do I want you to do every day?" she asked after the dancing stopped, as the students sat around her on the gym floor, catching their breath. "One hour of energizing play."

The program came to the magnet school thanks to the Community Health Center, which started it three years ago as part of its childhood obesity prevention campaign, said Rebecca Giantonio, spokeswoman for the center. It began sending dance-exercise instructors to 12 schools in Middletown, where the center's headquarters are located. Starting in September, as first lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" campaign for healthier schools was gaining momentum, "Recess Rocks!" spread to the 11 other communities around the state where the center operates health clinics. In southeastern Connecticut, CHC clinics are in New London, Groton and Old Saybrook.

"It's completely non-competitive," she said. "The whole idea is for it to be fun, so kids can move and expend some of their pent-up energy."

Paul Carolan, director of the school, said "Recess Rocks!" complements the school's overall healthful lifestyle initiatives, which include serving fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grain, low-sugar, low-fat foods for breakfast and lunch, as well as daily recess and outdoor time - even if only 10 minutes on bitter cold days. The school hopes to incorporate some of the "Recess Rocks!" techniques by sending teachers to workshops offered by the program, who would then use the moves and stretches in classroom activities, said Lauren Pierandi, manager of enrichment, recruitment and volunteers at the school.

The magnet school is preparing to apply for Silver Award status in the "Let's Move" program by documenting that its recess time, physical education classes, lunch menus and other areas meet high standards for fitness and nutrition, she said. The application would be in conjunction with New London public schools, which shares its bulk buying and menu-planning services with the regional school.

"It certifies that this is a commitment we're making as a school," Pierandi said.