Communication Summary
1. RMSEL Crew Fitness 2018-2019 School Year
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Dear RMSEL Parent Community,

Approximately three months ago, a member of our staff team stumbled across a trailer for a new documentary titled *The Motivation Factor: PE 50 Years Ago*. Prior to our monthly staff meeting, this team member showed a small group of staff the film and we were all instantly engaged with the alignment between physical health and fitness to the work we do with students at RMSEL in the field as well as in the classroom. The film is based on a speech made by President John F. Kennedy on December 26, 1960, titled *The Soft American* in which he provided the framework to launch the White House Presidential Fitness Committee. President Kennedy understood the important relationship of physical fitness in relationship to our capacity to perform at an optimal level in our professions and within the classroom. Kennedy begins with the connection between ancient civilizations and their understanding of physical fitness in relationship to the founding principles upon which many western civilizations are based.

“Beginning more than 2,500 years ago, from all quarters of the Greek world men thronged every four years to the sacred grove of Olympia, under the shadow of Mount Cronus, to compete in the most famous athletic contests of history—the Olympian games.

During the contest a sacred truce was observed among all the states of Greece as the best athletes of the Western world competed in boxing and foot races, wrestling and chariot races for the wreath of wild olive which was the prize of victory. When the winners returned to their home cities to lay the Olympian crown in the chief temples, they were greeted as heroes and received rich rewards; for the Greeks prized physical excellence and athletic skills among man’s greatest goals and among the prime foundations of a vigorous state.

Thus the same civilizations which produced some of our highest achievements of philosophy and drama, government and art, also gave us a belief in the importance of physical soundness which has become a part of Western tradition; from the mens sana in corpore sano of the Romans to the British belief that the playing fields of Eaton brought victory on the battlefields of Europe. This knowledge, the knowledge that the physical well-being of the citizen is an important foundation for the vigor and vitality of all the activities of the nation, is as old as Western civilization itself. But it is a knowledge which today, in America, we are in danger of forgetting.”

While Kennedy’s words were penned over fifty years ago, they could not be more relevant to the overall health and well being of our citizens and especially our children. Kennedy further articulates this importance, stating:

“But the harsh fact of the matter is that there is also an increasingly large number of young Americans who are neglecting their bodies—whose physical fitness is not what it should be—who are getting soft. And such softness on the part of individual citizens can help to strip and destroy the vitality of a nation.

For the physical vigor of our citizens is one of America’s most precious resources. If we waste and neglect this resource, if we allow it to dwindle and grow soft then we will destroy much of our ability to meet the great and vital challenges which confront our people. We will be unable to realize our full potential as a nation.
Throughout our history we have been challenged to armed conflict by nations which sought to destroy our independence or threatened our freedom. The young men of America have risen to those occasions, giving themselves freely to the rigors and hardships of warfare. But the stamina and strength which the defense of liberty requires are not the product of a few weeks’ basic training or a month’s conditioning. These only come from bodies which have been conditioned by a lifetime of participation in sports and interest in physical activity. Our struggles against aggressors throughout our history have been won on the playgrounds and corner lots and fields of America.

Thus, in a very real and immediate sense, our growing softness, our increasing lack of physical fitness, is a menace to our security.

In 2008, Dr. John J. Ratey wrote a research text titled Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain. Dr. Ratey studied the impact of fitness and brain activity as related to human performance in other contexts such as learning within school. The research results are astounding, but very simplistic, to implement and change within a school setting. Dr. Ratey is also featured as a key research expert in this field and is featured in the film that inspired our work. Every RMSEL staff member will be reading this foundational text over the summer in preparation for Ground School and the launch of our new fitness program for the 2018-2019 school year. I encourage every member of our community to also engage in this with us!

After seeing the film, understanding the context, and reviewing the research, we were left with but one question, “Why aren’t we doing this at RMSEL?” The research is clear and the counter argument is nonexistent; by improving our physical well-being daily before learning, we will engage with content and skills in both a more efficient and productive manner than remaining sedentary. Unfortunately, we have been conditioned in the 21st century to believe that more minutes with content is more important than quality minutes spent in the classroom. We are also conditioned to be fearful that we may get behind our peers if we don’t do things the exact same way as other institutions. RMSEL has never been about conformity to the status quo, as we were designed and constructed from a 1992 grant titled Break the Mold Schools!

On Tuesday, May 1, 2018, we gathered as a staff to view the film together and the energy in the room was invigorating. At the conclusion of the film, I shared the framework which we have constructed to ensure that students will have 40 minutes of daily fitness within the first two hours of the day 4 days a week in grades K-8, and 5 days a week in grades 9-12 for the 2018-2019 school year. Our staff was energized, as we all understand the connection between exercise and operating at our maximum capacity. We believe that this will have a profound impact on increasing student achievement, decreasing student discipline referrals, supporting social emotional learning, and reinforcing our character development.

As we embarked upon this journey, we reached out to Prescott Middle School, a school located in Modesto, CA, that has been doing a school-wide movement and heart rate based fitness program for over 50 years. Prescott is the school featured as a case study in the film. Upon our initial inquiry, we thought we would be instantly dismissed as hundreds of schools around the country had to be interested in seeing this program firsthand; but within one day their Athletic Director shared all their founding documents and programs with our team. As we began digging into their work we realized that we wanted to spend time with their staff and see this firsthand. Last week Middle School Crew Leader, Jessie O’Dell, and High School Crew Leader, Ian Silberman, spent the day with the students and staff at Prescott and their first words shared in our debrief were, “It is real!” The students were bought into the importance of the program, engaged 100% during class, supported and motivated their peers, and demonstrated excellence in character.
Over the summer a sub-committee will be working to launch our program over the first two months of school. We want to ensure that the foundation is laid correctly for future growth and success. During our weekly Professional Development sessions we will be planning and implementing routines for the program and monitoring student growth and performance. We believe that we will see profound results for our students both physically and academically. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me directly. I highly encourage you to rent the film on iTunes and pick up a copy of Spark to engage in this work with our crew!

**Hiring Update**

I am excited to announce that Jessica Dworkin will be joining our crew next school year as our new K/1 crew leader. Jessica has most recently worked in the Summit County School District at Silverthorne Elementary. Jessica is currently teaching second grade and is also serving as the team lead for her grade level. Prior to moving to second grade to be the team lead, she taught for three years in the Kindergarten classroom. In addition to her classroom experience, Jessica has also served as a Ski Instructor for Vail Resorts and is excited to work as a residence camp counselor this summer prior to working at RMSEL. Jessica is familiar with the EL Education Curriculum used on the team. While her departure from her mountain community is bittersweet, she is excited to share her passion with a new crew both in the classroom and in the field.

Erich Ball has been selected to join our crew as the new 6th grade Humanities & English Language Arts Crew Leader. Most recently, Erich has been teaching at Aurora Hills International Baccalaureate Middle School in grades 6 and 7. In addition to his work in the classroom, Erich is also the Head Soccer Coach. Prior to his classroom teaching experience, Erich was a team leader with Boulder County Youth Corps. We are excited for Erich to share his experiences with our returning 5th graders and new 6th graders next year.

Sincerely,

Chad