

[Fit4Kids Teaches Through Action](#)

April 4, 2017 11:55 am Published by [Jennifer Brown](#)

Cynthia Piazza is standing at the back of a group of kindergarten-aged children and following along as a young boy leads his classmates through [Vrkasana](#), better known to these children and many others as, "The Tree Pose." They are practicing alphabet yoga to cool down and calm their minds after rigorous play and learning activities.

Not a half hour before, Cynthia and I stood between four raised plant beds behind [Patrick Copeland Elementary School \(PCES\)](#) where surprisingly strong hordes of lettuce, carrots, broccoli and various herbs grew. First-graders were weeding this garden as two [Fit4Kids](#) "farmers" explained why weeding is so important. When they finished, each student sat down at a picnic table to try out salad made from the crops planted last fall (which smelled *amazing*).



Kindergartners enjoy the "Happy Baby" pose while going through alphabet yoga to calm down.



First-graders observe as a Fit4Kids farmer points out an insect traveling across one of the garden plants.

It's Cynthia's second and final year teaching and integrating the Fit4Kids program into PCES. She is one of Fit4Kids' four Wellness Integration Specialists that spend two years at a Title I school before moving to the next location.

*"The first year tends to be a "transitional" year. The staff are not quite sure what exactly my role is in the building. We have four specialists (Chesterfield, Richmond, Petersburg and Hopewell) but our individual schools and needs steer the direction of what we are involved with. No program looks identical and that is what makes it successful. The second year we continue to integrate lessons, and I hope to see more collaboration with staff. I begin to ask teachers how they can continue some of what they have seen... The model is two years of integration and then sustainability. Most schools do not want their specialist to leave, but our mission is to touch and reach as many schools, children and communities as we can!"**

In the first year, Cynthia is demonstrating in the classrooms a lot more. Before the garden and alphabet yoga that day, I watched Cynthia lead a class of first-graders

through a math lesson. They completed an addition problem, and once they found the sum, Cynthia and the kids did the same number of jumping jacks or squats. To say she is full of energy is an understatement.



Cynthia leads the kids through 10 Valentine's Day themed "heart squats" while teaching them about addition.

So, why all this activity and running around during the school day? Shouldn't kids be, you know, learning?

Well, childhood obesity rates have tripled across America in the last three decades matched with a decline in exercise and outside play.** If these trends continue, today's youth will be the first generation to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents. John Randolph Foundation believes in fighting for the health of children in our area, and Fit4Kids is a perfect partner. They don't just teach about healthy habits and exercise, they integrate health and wellness into all of their activities. Things like recumbent bike reading, subtraction tag, and time in the garden all contribute to the same goal.

So, while Cynthia is doing jumping jacks and squats, what she's really doing is forcing these kids to learn both mentally and physically at the same time, ensuring that they put these things to memory *and* get in a lot of exercise.

*"Active, well-nourished children learn more at school, have greater self-esteem, and grow to lead productive lives. Preventing childhood obesity isn't just about avoiding extra weight and disease, it's about building a brighter future. Fit4Kids is working to build this brighter future by infusing schools with a culture of health and wellness. Through this culture change, we strive to make the healthy choice the easy choice. And, after 26 years of teaching....every person I touch is a new relationship that can help me grow and learn; I can only hope I leave behind a legacy of learners (teachers, parents and students) and of course runners!"**

* Quotes from an email interview with Cynthia Piazza. [More about Cynthia here.](#)

** Information taken from the Fit4Kids website: [Read here.](#)