

Not just for 50 minutes... for a lifetime

Dani Blackwell is changing the stereotype and the curriculum of high school physical education, and educators across the state are watching. Department chair of physical education and health at West Albany High, Dani was recently named the Oregon High School Physical Education Teacher of the Year for her innovative approach to engaging students of all ability levels in physical education classes with the goal of fitness for a lifetime. “The key to students succeeding in PE class is offering a diversity of activities and actively engaging every student. It’s the Sport Education model that I learned at OSU,” says Dani, who earned her bachelor’s degree in exercise and sport science in 1998 and her master’s in physical education teacher education (MS PETE) in 1999. “I prefer my classes to be student-run, not teacher-lead,” she explains. “For example, one student may have interest in creating practice plans, while another who is good with numbers can be the team statistician. Every team needs a publicist, and someone who is artistic can make posters. And when we get down to playing, we already have a team, and we respect all learning levels. It’s not just about the traditional sports but includes activities like orienteering, cooperative games, rock climbing, and hiking.”

A self-proclaimed bench player, Dani says, “No one taught me to exercise for a lifetime, so I sat around and gained weight.” She knows the work it takes to get and stay in shape and the satisfaction and energy that comes with being healthy. She wants her students to find an exercise routine they can adopt for life. Dani is a great example for her students and her five kids. “I do something every day, and I mix it up – cardio, weights, walking, cycling.”

Associate professor and coordinator of the MS PETE program, Barbara Cusimano says OSU is one of a handful of schools nationwide that prepares physical education teachers using Sport Education, Fitness for Life, Teaching Games for Understanding, and Dynamic Physical Education models. “Moderate to

vigorous physical activity (MVPA) is a critical focus,” she explains. “We teach short set-up time and effective organization to maximize the time spent in actual physical activity. The Healthy People 2010 guidelines require that 50 percent of physical education time is MVPA. I think our teachers are probably exceeding that.” Barbara proudly reports that in the last three years, 100 percent of the MS PETE graduates were hired right after graduation. One reason may be that we are the only school in Oregon that trains in and requires student teaching for all levels – elementary, middle, and high school.”

Dani’s Fitness Principles

- Everyone participates
- Expectations are clear
- Celebrate when we’re done
- We’re in it for life



The skills Dani has learned teaching challenge courses and running the peer mediation program show as she guides her class through team-building exercises with the precision of a drill sergeant. Mixed in with her commands, you can hear the students strategizing, working, and laughing. “They’re engaged in physical activity, and they’re having fun,” says Dani. “With an experience like this, they’re much more inclined to continue physical activity throughout their lives.”