

# DEMAREST PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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## Wellness Initiative in Demarest Public Schools

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The Demarest School District's Wellness Initiative powered by the Demarest Child Study team enjoyed great success during the month of May and helped to promote mental health. The goal of the initiative was to provide students with easily accessible tools to cope with daily academic and social stressors while simultaneously increasing wellness and access to learning. Research has pointed to the importance of movement in the lives of children not only as a mechanism to contend with stress but also as a means to enhance learning and feel good in the process. The research also suggested a positive correlation between movement and learning and underscored the benefits of movement in relationship to students' physical health, psychological well-being, social skills development and academic performance. These findings served as the corner of the district's wellness initiative, entitled *Moving Our Bodies to Help Our Brains*. Every Monday and Friday throughout the month of May, students were invited to participate in a wellness drill: *A Time to Move Our Bodies to Help Our Brains*. Students engaged in a short movement break that included activities such as follow the leader, animal walk races and yoga. Furthermore, sensory stations were set up in all of the schools. These stations provided students access to a variety of kinesthetically based hands on materials created by the Child Study Team. Materials were chosen that calmly stimulated auditory, tactile and visual sensations and re-energized the brain for learning. Examples included, sensory trays with rice in which treasures were hidden and sensory bottles designed to capture the visual and auditory imagination of children. Finally, the health teacher challenged his eighth grade students to investigate the best natural means for dealing with daily hassles and acute stressors. These young researchers presented what they learned to the middle school community via a student run health fair. The importance of the mind body connection cannot be overstated: a lesson learned by pre-kindergarten through eighth grade students as they moved their bodies to help their brains!

(see pictures the next page)

