

“TIGERS ON THE RUN” RUNNING CLUB
SUNNY HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, BARRINGTON S.D. 220
(as written by Marisela Guzman, one of the teacher organizers, March 2016)

Running is not just to get from one place to another quickly. People run for various reasons; to stay healthy, to accomplish a goal or challenge, or simply to have fun. Running for our students at Sunny Hill represents something that is so much more. Our students at Sunny Hill ran last school year because they wanted to be the first to run for our school and wanted to make a statement. For many years Sunny Hill hadn't had representation until the day two teachers decided that they were going to call parents, look for volunteers, and change the mindset of some of our community members. In this case we are talking about a community that is hardworking, but are considered low income.

One of our first challenges was the registration fee. The registration fee of \$15 may seem minimal to many, but for our families they can use that amount to provide their children with food on the table or help pay a bill. The Sunny Community consists of 93% low-income students. We are a title one school. Consequently, money was an issue, but so were the nuances of the culture of our students. We needed to think creatively.

The first round of flyers went out and we ONLY received about 5 registrations and were very close to the deadline. We began to panic. In that moment Ms. Morales and I decided that we had to be more proactive and find sponsors. We could not let our students miss out on such an important experience - especially when our students need these types of experiences. We talked to our own family, friends, and businesses and got the ball rolling.

Some students were so motivated that they would ask us to PLEASE call their parents so that they would at least sign the form because they were not able to convince them. You see, running a race is not a cultural routine in our community. In that moment we realized that we needed to mold this new generation of students and their families into participating in important community events. Once we explained the relevance and importance, parents were on board. Our parents just needed to be educated on these types of events that don't fall within the cultural norm. We tried to instill the importance of being active citizens of a community. After we emphasized this, parents even helped us in this endeavor. The power of reaching out and face to face communication with our community was evident more than ever.

This event not only brought our community together but also built our student's self-esteem, and gave them a sense of giving back to their community, and made them aware that they can reach their goals through their actions and perseverance. They would come to practices with enthusiasm and saw how quick their stamina was growing and how they felt more energized during the day. Some fifth graders mentioned interest in pursuing cross-country in middle school and high school. The light in these children's eyes is one that we could never have put there. It was bright because they put it there themselves.

Today this running club has a name, "Tigers on the Run". We have applied for several grants, and so far have received one and have been denied one. That does not stop us in applying for more. We have more incentives and have a wonderful "Chicago Marathon" poster where our kids can track where they are in tracking 26 miles. Some are almost there! We also have more teacher volunteers who are helping and putting in their time and experience. None of the teachers who work with the club are paid or on a stipend. It is on a completely volunteer basis. We look forward to where this club can go. We look forward to the heights that these students and community can reach. We look forward to the future. We are running, not walking, forward.