



# Read! Deed! Run!



JWE Read, Deed, Run coaches Nicole Walker, Kara Goldblum, Courtney Calfee, and Krista Moore

JWE students give back, get fit, and enjoy reading books through campus program

*Written by Noreen Stavinoha*

*Photography by Chrishelle Spurgeons*

Baking cookies for neighbors, going for afternoon jogs, and embarking on exciting book adventures may sound like they have nothing to do with schoolwork. At Williams Elementary School, though, these activities are all part of the Read, Deed, Run program, designed to motivate students to give back, get fit, and broaden their horizons through reading. Started by teacher Courtney Calfee in 2008, the Read, Deed, Run program quickly took off at JWE, 10 other Katy ISD campuses, and even in two other Texas school districts.

## A Marathon of Learning

When Calfee decided to run the Chevron Houston Marathon in 2007, she expected it to be a satisfying accomplishment for herself. She didn't anticipate the positive, long-term impact her training would make on her fifth-grade students at JWE. "Once school started in the fall of 2006 and training races began, I started sharing my racing experiences with my students," she says. "They were excited to hear about my progress. On the day of the marathon, through the online tracking system, many students followed my progress as I ran."

The excitement generated by Calfee's racing experience set her to thinking about starting a running club at JWE. Her research into school running clubs led her to a program in St. Louis that impressed her a lot, so in 2008 she brainstormed with some of the other teachers to find a way to implement a similar program at their school.

The result was the Wrangler Read, Deed, and Run Marathon for fourth- and fifth-graders. Over a 25-week period, participants had very specific criteria. They were required to run the equivalent of a marathon, 26.2 miles. In addition, students also had to read 26 books or 2,600 pages and complete 26 hours of community service. Participants are required to keep a journal, where they record the number of pages read, the helpful deeds accomplished, and miles run. Reading is the only truly individual segment of the program. The rest is mostly accomplished in groups.

JWE Principal Ronnie Lee has seen firsthand the difference the program has made in the lives of students. "Fourth- and fifth-grade students, faculty members, and parents have the opportunity to join this vibrant afterschool program that nourishes the mind, body, and spirit," he shares.

## Taking Pride in Participating

To add excitement to the running part of the program, the last 1.2 miles is a group run patterned after a real marathon.

There is a start and finish line, runners have numbers, they are timed by a stopwatch, and they are awarded a finisher's medal and T-shirt at the end. Proud parents and staff are there to congratulate those students who had the perseverance to finish the entire program.

One such finisher is Gracie Shanks. She proudly completed her triple Read, Deed, Run Marathon at the end of her fifth-grade year in 2011. After hearing about the challenge from her teacher Molly Shaw, she decided to participate. The only part that bothered her was the running portion. She was an avid reader and greatly enjoyed community service projects, but she had never considered herself an athlete. Still, she decided to try it and found she had a lot of fun along the way.

"Some of us made blankets for Katy Christian Ministries," Shanks says. "We decorated IV poles for the kids in the hospital, and we had a party at Texas Children's Hospital for the kids. I baked cookies for the neighbors and made dinner for a family who had lost someone." And those were just a few of the 26 good deeds she helped out with that school year.

"I learned that doing things to help others is actually fun," she grins. "I'm not doing anything at school right now, but I do things through my church. Once, I helped with a service for people in the nursing home. Last year, we did a lot of service projects for the veterans at our church."

## Going the Extra Mile

Teachers, and sometimes even the principal, run with the students at the school track at the end of the day to help them rack up 13 of their miles. Running also became a family affair for Shanks. She and her parents ran throughout their neighborhood to help her earn the rest of her 26.2 miles. Her class ran the very last portion of their required miles together, following the path around a lake in a nearby subdivision.

In the end, Shanks decided she liked running after all and plans on joining the junior high track team next year. She runs regularly and finds inspiration every time she looks at her Read, Deed, Run medal and T-shirt.

## The Heart of the Program

While the program targets the mind, body, and heart of a child with equal importance, teachers have noted amazing results from the community service portion. At JWE, 256 students have performed more than 6,500 hours of volunteer service in the four years the program has been in place. With



JWE students Andy, Keshav, and Connor run one mile as part of the program

The Read, Deed, Run program challenges students to read 26 books or 2,600 pages, complete 26 hours of community service, and run 26.2 miles



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the addition of 10 more Katy ISD schools, students have reached a grand total of 11,000 hours this year alone.

Calfee remembers one incident that really epitomizes the goal she has of teaching kids to love people, regardless of their situation. During the program's first year, students served Thanksgiving dinner to a group of homeless people in downtown Houston. One of the students, Alex May, shared his thoughts about the experience with Calfee. He had talked

to one of the men they had served and was told that despite having no house to live in, the man was happy. With wonder in his voice, May said, "Ms. Calfee, I didn't know that you could have nothing and still be happy." It's enough to warm a teacher's heart. **KM**

*NOREEN STAVINOHA lives in Katy with her husband and miniature schnauzer and loves to tell the stories of interesting people.*



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