

## Adding A Dance Program To Your School

By Phyllis Ventresca There's nothing like dance for adults with its agility, strengthening and fitness rewards. So why not add it to your school? Kids, in particular girls, will line up to get in on the exercise. As we all know from teaching gym classes, girls can often miss out on fitness segments because they are under motivated to join in on competitive sports. Here are some key considerations before launching such a program.

1. It's really important to send a few staffers out for a semester of dance at a dance school. You wouldn't expect your teachers to teach Math without some preparation, so why would dance be any different? In choosing a class, it would be excellent for a few staff members to take adult hip-hop and cheerleading. Adult hip-hop is very in and can often great fitness benefits. It is also a quick sell for kids. Cheerleading likewise is easy to turn into a lunch or after school program.
2. For any program to be successful, advertise by word of mouth. Ask children in each grade groups to spread the word for a maximum turn out if it is voluntary. If it is not voluntary, consider adding it in the winter months for 20 to 30 minutes of cardio each day after the lunch bell invites kids back in. There is no better way to get children grounded and ready for the rest of the day.
3. Have teachers plan a safe warm-up out on paper. Have them do the same warm-up as a matter of routine and include stretching. Warm-ups are important. Don't forget to include some jumping jacks when doing either hip-hop or cheerleading as well as the obligatory hamstring stretches and shoulder blade stretches. As a general rule, stretches are more fluid in dance. In a traditional gym classes, stretches are quick and fast but with dance spend five seconds on a stretch extra for added benefits. In dance, warm muscles count.
4. Have teacher choreograph and learn a dance segment, then teach it routinely as the main point of the dance program. One segment can usually be learned in three to six weeks. The choreographing should be fun. If in doubt, invite the local dance teacher to give you a hand working it out. Kids gain more confidence the more times they do the dance. When you think you have lots of kids mastering the skills, invite a few up to the front to show their hip new moves with the teachers.
5. Consider your music choices appropriately and screen songs for suggestible lyrics. Remember that you can't unring a bell and you'll do well at this one. There are lots of hip hop tunes that are about positive body image and it is much easier than other forms of dance music to steer away from more adult thoughts.
6. Plan a great warm-down. Consider putting children in charge as they become more familiar. The key thing is to make sure the body doesn't go from 50 MPH to 0 in less than 5 to ten minutes.
7. Make sure that children have access to water following the work-out.
8. Consider putting on an assembly for parents where they learn to dance along with their children.
9. Take notes each year about dance moves and choeographed routines for future staffers that may move into the role.
10. Consider phoning up the local dance school and getting your teachers in on a discount for adult classes. They'd probably be thrilled.

Most of all, have fun. Adding a dance program is excellent for fitness and I encourage you in your efforts.

### About the Author

Phyllis Ventresca runs Philamena School of Dance in Barrie, Ontario. She is currently taking registrations for her evening and Saturday dance sessions for kids through adults starting at 2 years of age. In addition, she still has several spaces for her summer camp program in fine arts, including: dance, singing, cooking and arts and crafts, not to mention fun! Her website is <http://www.webstrong.ca/PhilamenaSchoolofDance/>.

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