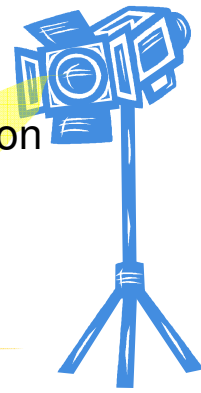


California School Health Centers Association
Spotlight On
Health Idol
At Lincoln High School



The **Health Idol Wellness Program**, currently in its fifth year at San Francisco's Abraham Lincoln High School, is a reality show-themed fitness competition where 30 contestants compete against each other for the title of Health Idol. Wellness Center staff, teachers, and students alike come together in challenges of physical fitness, mental acuity, and social savvy in a holistic fitness face-off.

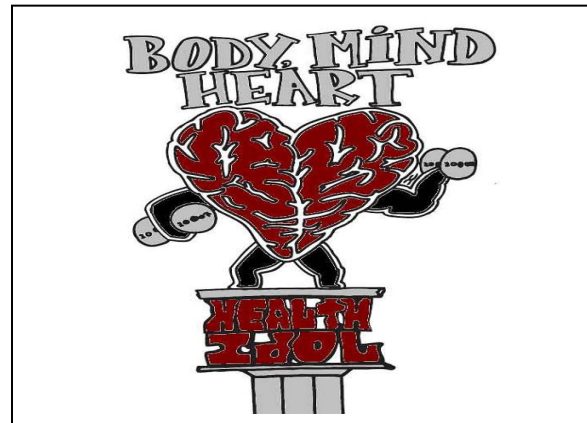
With its innovative blend of pop culture, health education, and hands-on activities, Health Idol is the winner of The California School Health Centers Association's **2008 Outstanding Nutrition and Fitness Program Award**.

The Health Idol competition is held throughout the second semester of the school year, allowing contestants time to prepare for its ten rounds of competition. First prize is a \$100 gift certificate, with \$50 and \$25 certificates for the runners up.

The challenges are pre-announced and include fitness standards, such as push-ups and sit-ups, as well as more unconventional health assessments like sudoku puzzles, health quizzes, and tests of social support. Information about the value of the qualities measured in the competition is publicized around campus during each round.

While in past years contestants have competed against each other as individuals, the 2008 Health Idol competition followed the reality show trend of placing competitors into teams.

The three teams – Body, Mind, and Heart – represent the various aspects that contribute to individual wellness. The team approach has helped the Wellness Center to coordinate the selection process for the popular health program, which received over 75 student applications in 2006.



Health Idol Logo (2008)

The selection process is not an easy one; applicants must complete short essays on their reasons for competing which are used to select the final 30 competitors. The applications are processed anonymously and read by stakeholders in various aspects of student health; Team Body is selected by the school's athletic department, Team Mind by the academic counselors, and Team Heart by the school's Wellness Center.

The use of teams has turned what was once a mostly individualized competition into an exercise in social support. Before the team approach, organizers helped to motivate participants through "body snatchers"-- unofficial competitors who

were paired with an official contestant, and could take their place if they outperformed their competing “twin.”

The current team model uses a different type of motivation. Team members help to encourage each other and often train together for difficult events, such as the mile run. It is not until the later rounds that teammates must compete against each other directly. With each team comprised of a mix of genders, grade levels, and backgrounds, what began as a fun competition quickly becomes an important tool for building the school’s sense of community.

Individuals also benefit from participating. Even competitors who aren’t out to “win it all” increase their sense of self-efficacy by exceeding their personal expectations. One teacher who competed in a previous year was remembered to have said, “If I can just get to round two, I’ll be happy. I want to do it for my daughter.” She eventually made it all the way to round 6 out of 10.

The competition is kept on the forefront in school news, with its own website and semester-long coverage on the front page of the school newspaper. Self-esteem is also improved as contestants become mini school celebrities and discover new mediums for achievement. In the past, truant students who were accepted into the program have improved their attendance, possibly from a greater sense of connection to the school.

Returning contestants, of whom there are at least a few every year, have demonstrated significant improvements in their GPA from one competition to the next. There seems to be a heightened sense of support in the school climate as students

become invested in the success of their peers and faculty.

This year’s winner, **Ian Enriquez**, is a counselor at the school’s Wellness Center and the first staff member to win the coveted “Health Idol” title. Coincidentally, Ian is also the founder of the Health Idol Program. Regarding the program design, he explains, “Sometimes kids can feel that if they’re not athletes or A-students, they’re nobodies. One of the strengths of Health Idol is that it brings opportunities for achievement beyond organized sports and academics. Health Idol also shows people that fitness is not always related to body size.”



Students compete in a Health Idol balance test (2007)

Ian is already excited for next year’s competition, where he will have to defend his title against a new throng of eager competitors. “Fitness and nutrition have the potential to be something fun,” he says. “That doesn’t have to stop in elementary school.”

Health Idol has even inspired similar events at Lincoln High, such as *Lincoln Gladiators*, a fitness fundraiser for juniors and seniors. When asked how he feels about other schools starting Health Idol spin-offs, Ian grins -- “I certainly hope they do.”

Are you the next Health Idol?

Contact CSHC at info@schoolhealthcenters.org

By: Teresa Chin