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Search**A full-body (student) workout****The Einstein Center had no way to help students get their PE. A little luck landed the school an entire gym.**By **ROBIN HINDERY/Democrat staff Writer**

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A school in a shopping mall offers unique perks, including ample parking, easy access to part-time job opportunities, and the inspiration and tools for nontraditional courses such as fashion merchandising.

But administrators of the new Einstein Education Center in Woodland's County Fair Mall were stumped when faced with a problem most schools never encounter: how to provide students with their state-mandated physical education.

A solution arrived in the form of Jerry Miller, co-owner of Workout Express on Court Street in Woodland. Miller first heard about the Einstein school when Einstein's principal, Linda Christopher-Miles, gave a presentation about it to the Rotary Club of Woodland, of which Miller is a member.

"While I'm listening to her, being the owner of a gym, I'm wondering, 'Well, how are they going to get their PE units?'" Miller said.

He and fellow owner Kris Nordstrom decided to help out, offering free use of the Workout Express for any Einstein student with unmet physical education requirements. About half of the students filled the requirements already at their previous high schools, but for the rest, Einstein will require about 75 hours of physical education per semester, Christopher-Miles said.

California has long touted the importance of health and fitness in the schools, and it is one of only three states to include physical education on their state educational report cards.

"There couldn't be a better gift for him to give us," Christopher-Miles said of Miller's offer. "We knew PE would be something the students would have to do on their own time - as independent study - and this will make it so much easier for them. It's also nice because we want to have our school connect to the community."

The Einstein school offers an alternative path to a high-school diploma for students ages 14 to 19 who have left their former schools or who are not succeeding at traditional high schools.

The school's approach is "competence-based," meaning students follow an individually designed academic program and are allowed to progress at their own pace. The school is supported by both federal funds and a \$300,000 grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The current Einstein facility, which consists of two classrooms and a large room with 100 computer stations, is equipped to strengthen the mind but not the body. Workout Express helps meet that need, Miller said. The 2-year-old, 5,000-square-foot gym is set up for circuit-training, with aerobic stations mixed in. A complete workout there is designed to take about 30-35 minutes, Miller said.

Fifty-eight of Einstein's 111 students are coming to the school from outside the Woodland Joint Unified School District, according to figures provided by the Yolo County Office of Education on Aug. 23. Workout Express stays open on weekends, which could especially benefit those commuters, Miller said.



Workout Express co-owners Kris Nordstrom, top left, and Jerry Miller, top right, give Vickie Looney and her 17-year-old son Casey information about the Woodland gym. The two men are offering free membership to students at the new Einstein Education Center who still need to fill their physical education requirements. (Deo Ferrer/Democrat)

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The gym also provides the Einstein students with key tags that they swipe upon entering - a useful way of keeping track of whether or not students are putting in the necessary time.

"Our students are kids who are very much interested in working independently," Christopher-Miles said. "This fits really well into that independent-learning model."

Casey Looney, a 17-year-old senior at Einstein who joined the gym a week into the fall semester, said he thought his friends would all take advantage of the Workout Express offer. The Woodland teen previously had been working out at home with free weights and a bench, staying fit in order to pursue his dream of becoming a firefighter or paramedic, his mom Vickie said.

Miller requires a parent or guardian to accompany each student when they first visit the gym, not only to sign liability forms but also to "check out the facility and see that it's clean and safe," he said. Once the forms are signed, students can work out without a chaperone, though Vickie Looney said visiting the gym with her son had made her consider joining as well.

Within the first week after classes started Aug. 22, about 10 students had already signed up and 20 more had made orientation reservations, Miller said.

"Hopefully the kids will stick with it," he said. "I'm offering this for free, but I can't make them come. I know some kids hate PE, but I want to tell them, 'Come on, don't let this be the obstacle to your diploma.'"

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