

UofL alum brings physical education back to local elementary school

Program reinvigorated thanks to gift from Pepsi Stronger Together Foundation

By **Natalie Hewlett** - MAY 27, 2022



Abbas Sattar-Shamsabadi

Abbas Sattar-Shamsabadi, a two-time graduate of the University of Louisville, is building a health and physical education program from the ground up after Atkinson Elementary School's gymnasium sat dark for 15 years.

A unique partnership with UofL's College of Education and Human Development and a gift from the **Pepsi Stronger Together Initiative**, allowed the P.E. program to be reinvigorated. Pepsi's \$160,000 gift allowed for the hiring of Sattar-Shamsabadi, along with a few facility updates.

"I want to instill a good relationship with the kids and help them build their own relationships with their physical, mental, emotional and social health. That's huge in P.E., and it's huge in

the classroom,” said Sattar-Shamsabadi, who holds a bachelor’s degree in Health and Human performance and a Master of Arts in Teaching degree in Health and Physical Education.

His philosophy is in line with research findings about the impact of physical health and education on mental health and attention. Students who engage in physical education courses while in school are more likely to be active outside of school and are almost twice as likely to continue to be active to a healthy level in adulthood, **according to data from the CDC**. Students who are physically active also demonstrate better classroom behavior and a greater ability to focus.

“It’s made a huge difference in the energy levels of the students,” said Sattar-Shamsabadi. “There’s a definite shift in their mood when they know they have P.E. class that week. They’re more excited, they’re more engaged in the classroom when I walk by and check in on them.”

And it’s not just about the emotional and physical benefits of activity, he adds. It’s about exposure to the world of health and wellness activities.

“A lot of the students know about football and basketball, but their knowledge sometimes stops there,” Sattar-Shamsabadi said. “So, they’re learning new skills and activities they may never have had access to otherwise. I’d like to thank Pepsi for providing this opportunity for me, the community and the students here at Atkinson.”

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