

Blue Zones

“Think positively and exercise daily, eat healthy, work hard, stay strong, build faith, worry less, read more, and be happy.” – Anonymous



Bonita Springs Elementary Principal Robert Cooper prepares to cut the ribbon. SPECIAL TO THE NAPLES DAILY NEWS

Bonita Springs Elementary joins list of schools helping people live longer, better lives

Joseph Stoner
Blue Zones Project Schools and Youth Coordinator

Since 2015, 27 schools including public, parochial, and charter in Lee and Collier Counties have joined Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida. These schools voluntarily work to optimize their well-being environment in order to help maximize learning. In fact, Bonita Springs Elementary recently became the first school in Southwest Florida to become both an approved school and workplace. This important recognition means the school is committed to improve well-being not just among students, but also faculty and staff.

“We encourage more movement through our Physical Education activities and within class where students can stand up at their desk if they need to,” said Robert Cooper, Principal at Bonita Springs Elementary. “We also go further to include life safety activities like water safety classes for kids and staff, and a bike rodeo where kids learn how to cross the street safely using their bicycles.”

Amanda Schumbacker, teacher and wellness coordinator at Bonita Springs Elementary adds that they have incorporated well-being measures like walking paths to encourage longer walks to class, yoga breaks in classrooms, and a garden area that grows fresh pineapple and starfruit which is served in the school. Teachers are also encouraged to take part in the yoga breaks to help de-stress. “We are lucky to have a very health conscious team at our school that was able to come up with so many ideas for better health,” said Schumbacker.

Bonita Springs Elementary is among 27 other Blue Zones Project schools that incorporate research-based, well-being measures in their activities to include focusing on family, belonging, finding purpose, and connecting with the community. They are also find-



Students in Blue Zones approved schools are seeing more opportunities to strengthen their emotional and mental well-being by taking advantage of mindfulness and brain breaks during their classes. GETTY IMAGES

ing ways to include healthier options in their food service programs. Examples of other schools include Pine Crest Elementary school holding family fun night with a Blue Zones theme, and Barron Collier High school recently holding a purpose workshop for their students.

The combined well-being measures taken by Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida schools are encouraging. According to Florida Department of Health, Collier County Public School obesity rates among middle and high schools declined from 2014 to 2018, while the rest of the state of Florida rose for the same age groups.

In addition, students in Blue Zones approved schools are seeing an increase in steps per week, healthier options in the cafe-

teria, and more opportunities to strengthen their emotional and mental well-being by taking advantage of mindfulness and brain breaks during their classes.

Kudos to the staff, students, parents and community partners who are helping make healthy choices easier for our youth. These champions are some of our unsung heroes for our youngest generation. If you would like to help your school or that of your child or grandchild benefit from Blue Zones Project, contact Joe Stoner at Joseph.Stoner@sharecare.com.

As the great Arthur Ashe once said: “Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.”