

Article Launched: 5/15/2006 06:06 AM

## School's daily loop reaches 2,500 miles

By Julie Kay/Staff Writer  
TheReporter.Com

Cooper Elementary School students and staff wanted to take on something big. So earlier this month, they started walking. Together, they poured their strength and passion into the effort. For two weeks they marched on, starting early each morning. By Friday, they had walked an astounding 2,500 miles.

Cumulatively, that is.

The grand journey took place on the school's brand-new walking loop, which Cooper launched to promote student health and help them develop good exercise habits.

Now, student members of the "Feelin' Good Fitness Club" can be seen walking before school or during recess, racking up mile after mile.

"We wanted to start a wellness program," said Cooper principal Susan Drews. "What's better than a fun club to get them exercising?"

The quarter-mile loop follows the edges of the school's grassy field, crosses the blacktop, and returns to the field. It was funded largely by a fitness grant from Kaiser, and built by Eagle Scout and Vacaville High School student Ryan Smart.

The walking trail is the second of its kind in the school district. Alamo Elementary School also has one, which Drews said has been a great success.

"We just kind of piggybacked on Alamo's experience," said Drews. "We were very fortunate to have someone like Ryan step up."

Cooper's walking club is voluntary and non-competitive. Students are rewarded for their efforts with a series of foot-shaped rainbow charms, which they wear proudly on silver necklaces. Students earn a new one after every five miles and another when they reach a 25-mile mark. Students who walk one hundred miles will be honored at a school assembly.

Third-grader Michael Miller already has 30 miles under his belt.

"My goal is to walk a hundred," he said, breaking momentarily from his recess walk. Sometimes he walks alone, he said, and other times he walks with friends.

Miller's mother sometimes joins Michael on the daily pre-school walk. Other parents come as well, some pushing strollers.

"The parents love it," said Cooper PTA president DaNae Peterson. "They also hope it will improve behavior and even improve test scores."

Fifth-graders Katie Rico and Samantha Smith agreed that their daily strolls might help them on tests. Walking helps "sometimes when you just want to clear your head," said Samantha.

Walking also serves as a perfect complement to another of the girls' favorite activities.

"We like to walk and talk," explained Katie.

Drews has big plans for the trail, including inviting local stars like the superintendent and the mayor to come walk, and establishing a weekly evening family jaunt.

Drews and Peterson said students' interest in participating has surpassed their highest expectations.

"We were overwhelmed by their response," said Drews. "They were so excited."

*Julie Kay can be reached at [schools@thereporter.com](mailto:schools@thereporter.com).*