

## Terence C. Reilly School No. 7

Unlike just about every other school in the country, at 2:45 p.m. almost all of the students at Terence C. Reilly School No. 7 are still focused on their teachers.

Very few of them are staring out the window, according to Principal Jennifer Cedeno. And she chalks up the students' attention span—and their academic performance—to an innovative health and nutrition program that was just recognized by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation with a Gold National Recognition Award.

Giovanni Vargas, an eighth grade student at Terence C. Reilly, agrees. "In other schools," he said, "in the last couple of minutes of class you're not really paying attention. You're wondering 'When am I leaving?' and you're looking at the clock. Over here you're saying, 'I'm ready; let's answer some questions.'"

"Health and physical education make up one of the pillars of our program," Cedeno pointed out. As principal of the school since it opened in 2009, she had the opportunity to design the students' schedule from scratch. She decided to include sports clinics and classes in exercise science and various dance styles, as well as standard physical education.

"That gets students moving at least five times a day in addition to what they're getting for PE," she said proudly. "That happened right from the beginning."

The result? In its third year, Terence C. Reilly is one of two 2012 gold-award recipients out of more than 15,000 schools that participate in the Alliance's Healthy Schools Program (the school won bronze in its first year and silver last



year). But students at the school, located in Elizabeth, New Jersey, are also high achievers in academics.

"Every year we've had a pretty significant increase in how our students have been doing," Cedeno said. "Our eighth grade students are performing in language arts at 100 percent efficiency and that's unheard of in many places."

Giovanni credits his academic success to better nutrition, especially the carrots, green apples and red peppers that the school serves as snacks. While not a fan of the carrots in particular, he still understands the importance of all these healthier foods.

"I have so much more energy. I am more focused, and I can do so much more," he said. "My grades have grown so much that it's unbelievable, and my parents say 'What happened? What happened to your grades?'"

"This is why it's important to incorporate a variety of foods into your diet. Each food brings its own nutritional value to the table," explained Isiah Halsey, physical education and health instructor at the school. "I teach my kids that our body is like a machine and needs all these different nutrients to function properly."

Halsey, who has taught at the school since it opened, has been a force for innovation at Terence C. Reilly, creating spoofs of popular TV programs that involve students and teachers, including "Dancing with a Teacher" and "Are You Healthier than a P.E. Teacher?" The competitions, with the school's older students, are taped and then shown to the younger students. Building on the school's progress, Cedeno foresees more success in the years to come.

"It's like rolling that ball up the hill at the beginning," she pointed out. "It's really, really hard, but now that we've pushed that ball over, the momentum is on our side and there's very little resistance to these healthy initiatives."

