

# Promoting Physical Fitness Among Latinos with Bailoterapia

*Eva Falk*

## Summary

In 2016, Cultiva La Salud and its subcontractor, Ceres Partnership for Healthy Children (CPHC) were successful in establishing a joint-use agreement which opened school space to Latino residents. Today, over 23,000 Latinos living in the surrounding neighborhood of Carroll Fowler Elementary School have increased their physical activity levels by participating in Bailoterapia; a form of aerobic dance akin to Zumba. Resident engagement was key to seeing this agreement realized and in garnering support from Ceres Unified School District (CUSD) and the City of Ceres. Now Latino residents are maximizing the opportunity to get fit.

## Challenge

With a population of nearly 50,000, Ceres is a small-rural town in California's Central Valley where nearly 70% of residents are obese or overweight. The city has just one park within in the city limits and the majority of neighborhoods lack sidewalks and proper safety measures for pedestrians and bicyclists. The only safe places where residents could be physically active are the playgrounds, green spaces and athletic fields at their neighborhood schools. However, many of these spaces are closed after school hours and on weekends. Investment in needed infrastructure may take years to complete, but by utilizing existing spaces such as school gyms, residents can have immediate access to opportunities to be physically active.

## Solution

At a community meeting, Latino residents shared solutions for addressing the lack of safe places to be active and agreed that schools functioning as parks would bring the biggest impact to the community. Not only was there an interest in utilizing school space but also culturally relevant activities, like dance was suggested. CPHC staff and parents met with the Assistant Superintendent of CUSD to present the concept of Bailoterapia classes being offered at Carroll Fowler Elementary School in the cafeteria during evening hours, as a way to increase physical activity opportunities for the community. CUSD approved the pilot program and has committed to the expansion of the sites. As a result, Bailoterapia is offered one day per week at Carroll Fowler Elementary.



## Your Involvement is Key

**Cultiva La Salud is dedicated to engaging, informing and inspiring Latino residents to actively advance personal, family and community health through healthy lifestyles and civic engagement. To learn more about Cultiva and ways you can become involved, visit: [www.CultivaLaSalud.org](http://www.CultivaLaSalud.org). For more information about the Joint-Use Agreement Model and for Joint-Use Agreement resources, visit: [www.ChangeLabSolutions.org](http://www.ChangeLabSolutions.org)**

## Results

As a result of Latino resident engagement and empowerment, the joint-use initiative allows over 23,000 Latino residents to be physically active and support their good health. This initiative qualifies for funds from Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) which are funds intended to help school districts address the needs of vulnerable students and families. With funding and continued support from CUSD, this initiative has the potential to expand physical activity opportunities for Latino residents even further through the number of days classes are offered, school sites offering Bailoterapia classes, and by broadening programs offered to include use of school facilities and green space. This initiative has the potential to impact the long-term health of Latino children and residents of the City of Ceres for years to come.

### Contact

#### Eva Falk

Cultiva La Salud  
Fresno, CA  
559-498-0870 phone  
www.cultivalasalud.org

*"I've struggled with a lot of health issues and was told I would soon be paralyzed, but after attending the Bailoterapia classes, my depression is gone and my health and mobility has improved a lot."*

- Genny Sanchez

## Sustainable Success

The goals for this initiative are to expand the joint-use agreement to include additional days during the week for Bailoterapia classes in the next year, expand Bailoterapia classes to all 15 elementary schools within CUSD in the next two years, and expand the joint-use agreement to include access to other facilities within the school, such as the outdoor sports area and green space in the next two years. A plan has been developed to recruit parent volunteers who are willing to be trained as Bailoterapia instructors. CPHC staff is also working with the City Council and the City's Recreational Department to help fund programmatic activities at the school sites in the evenings and weekends through LCAP funds.