



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Elementary Athletes Learn to Compete with Character**

*Paso Robles, CA (September 26, 2017)* – Elementary student athletes are not only learning how to compete in Paso Robles Joint Unified School District (PRJUSD), they are also learning how to compete with character. PRJUSD has extended its elementary athletic program to include a ceremony at the end of each game where teams hand out athletic character medals to opposing team members. The character medals are funded by the Rotary Club of Paso Robles and ACE Promotions.

PRJUSD was the first district in San Luis Obispo County to provide a free, comprehensive athletic program for elementary schools. Students in grades three through five have the opportunity to participate in sports such as cross country, wrestling, and track and field. Also available for students in grades four and five are volleyball, basketball, and soccer. Teams practice on Tuesdays and Thursdays after school and compete on Fridays. All athletes are provided uniforms and transportation to and from games. PRJUSD Athletic Director, Rich Clayton, explains that the purpose of athletics at that young age is to “allow all students the opportunity to develop character, compete in a safe environment, and experience the feeling of being on a team while also learning how to play a sport.”

Last year, nearly 800 elementary students participated in after-school sports in just the second year of the program. This year, PRJUSD elementary athletics added a new component to the competition, the athletic character medal. Each week of practice is devoted to teaching students about a particular athletic expectation for behavior: safety, respect, responsibility, encouragement, and doing your best.

At the end of each game on Fridays, teams huddle together to determine which member from the opposing team best demonstrated the character trait. Representatives from the teams explain why that student should be recognized and then present a school medal from their team. Superintendent Chris Williams views this as an extension of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) program already present in all schools. “We believe it’s important to teach students not only about physical movement in athletics, but also character, teamwork, and sportsmanship. Our schools have done an outstanding job in teaching behavior expectations on campus through our PBIS program and this takes the program from our classrooms out into our extracurricular activities.”

The first season of elementary athletics is wrapping up. The district championships for girls’ volleyball and boys’ and girls’ cross country will be held on Friday, October 13, beginning at 3:00 at Paso Robles High School. Practices for wrestling will start on October 17. For more information or to inquire about joining a team, please email [info@pasoschools.org](mailto:info@pasoschools.org) or pick up a packet at any school site.

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