

School Aims To Lose

February 14, 2005 — It's a school with a unique mission and it appears to be really paying off for some kids.

With so many sweets on the table, Valentine's Day is especially tough on obese kids, but students at the Academy Of The Sierras in Reedley, are getting a life-altering education.

17-year-old student, Allison Cole says, "We've all grown up big our whole lives and we know what it's like to be joked. What it's like with other kids. We're very supportive because we know what it's like."

Cole came from Virginia Beach to the Academy Of The Sierras in Reedley to start a new life.

Students here are learning how to make healthy choices. "Yeah like I didn't know you could eat so much fruit. Like fruit's really good. I didn't know what kind of meat we could eat but like buffalo is not that bad. When they said we eat buffalo I was like are you serious?"

The buffalo burgers have been a big hit. Buffalo is served because its one of the leanest meats around.

The salad bar represents an uncontrolled section. You can eat as much as you want.

14-year-old student Robert Klein says, "I've tried camps and stuff and this is place is really amazing. I can't believe I found a place I actually like and lose weight."

Klein is from Chicago. His parents pay \$5,000 a month to attend a school described as a last resort.

Executive Director Ryan Craig says, "Last semester students lost an average of 55 pounds. That works out to four pounds a week."

Craig says the students have learned to make behavioral changes that will carry over once they leave.

The clinically obese often struggle in school but students have blossomed here says Craig, "It's actually more often their peers in the group sessions saying now why would you do that, why are you here? Are you just waiting your time or are you going to get serious?"

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Students start each morning with a three-mile walk and are required to take 10,000 steps a day. They wear pedometers.

33 students attend the academy whose enrollment doubled last month.

The kids take field trips to restaurants to test what they've learned and to see if they'll make the right choices.

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