

Hanging in there

By SUSAN AVERILL

FARMINGTON — Wrapping their legs around one of the Portogym's horizontal bars, three sixth graders let go and hang headfirst like bats, getting a whole new perspective of the gym floor.

It was great fun, and they had to get as much mileage out of it as they could for it was the last of the three weeks during the year that the equipment would be available to them. Constantly making a tour of the district's 17 elementary schools, is such gymnastics equipment as the Portogym, a sidehorse and uneven parallel bars. It rests in each school's gym for three weeks before moving on, while children from kindergarten to sixth grade experiment with it.

Though a pinched nerve in her back prevents gym teacher Eleanor Snyder of Ten Mile Elementary School from actively demonstrating proper gymnast's technique, the injury does have its benefits.

"The kids are listening better. They have to, because I have to tell them how to do something instead of show it to them," she said with a grin.

Besides, she said, they learn more from themselves than from the teacher.

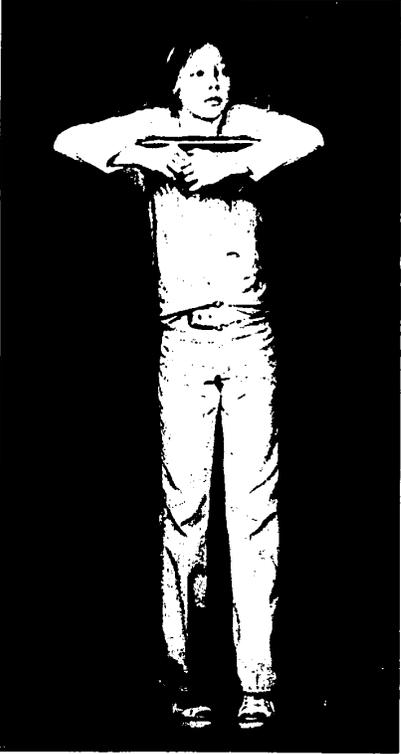
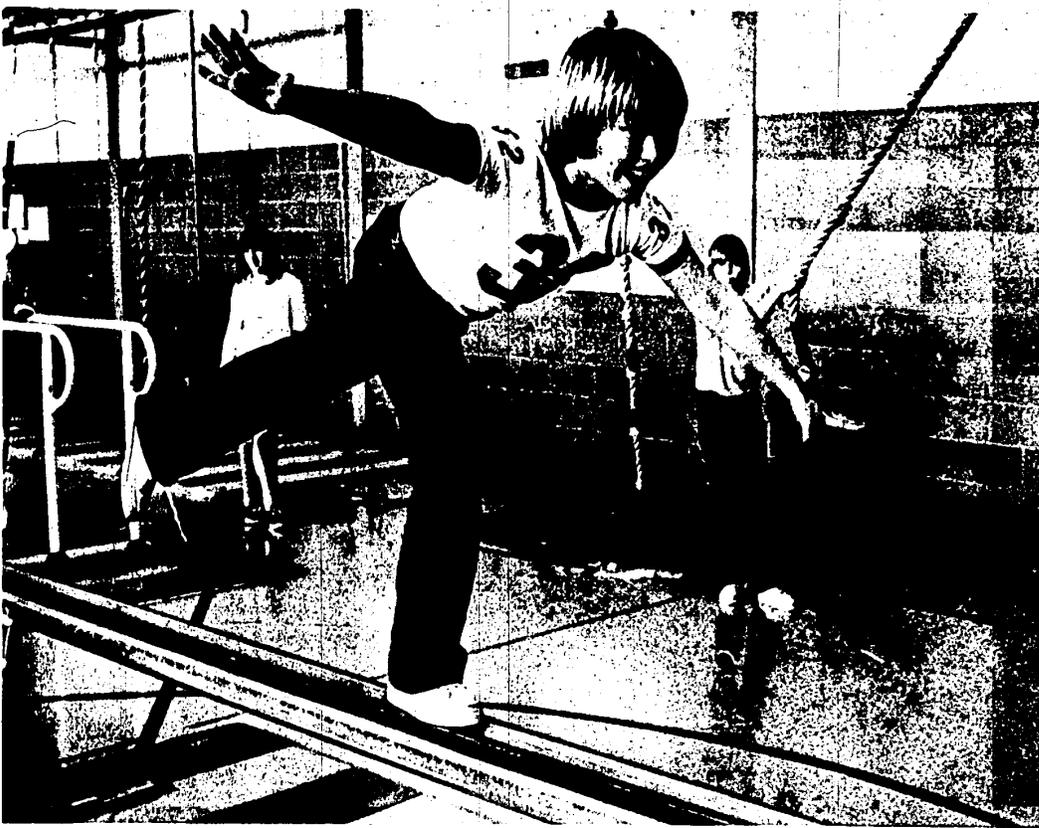
Older children, those who have used the equipment since kindergarten, have begun to keep an eye on the younger ones.

Students work out on the equipment three times a week, and are first allowed several days to familiarize themselves with it. Then the basic skills begin.

"This is not really supposed to prepare them for high school gymnastics. It's more a lesson in muscle control and coordination," Ms. Snyder said.

The only serious injury occurred when a student doing a difficult shoulder stand on the parallel bars tripped over the mat at the end of her stum and broke her wrist.

Students are now learning to vault the sidehorse, play catch on the balance beam and mimic Tarzan's liona swinging on a thick rope attached to the ceiling.



Staff photos by Harry Mauthe