

Issue Brief

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Incorporating Physical Activity and Quality Physical Education in Schools

Background

Physical inactivity greatly impacts the likelihood of being overweight or obese. Regardless of weight, being physically active on a regular basis contributes to a number of health benefits, including controlling and/or maintaining a healthy weight and reducing the risks for many chronic diseases. Schools have been identified as a key setting for public health strategies to prevent and decrease the prevalence of overweight and obesity.¹ Schools provide an opportune place to have an impact on physical activity behaviors of youth-at-large. National recommendations are that all children are physically active everyday for a least one hour.²

Best Practice

Policies and environmental variables in schools impact physical activity behaviors of children. Providing opportunities for students to be active throughout the school day in addition to ensuring that quality physical education is part of every student's curriculum is vitally important not only to students overall health but also to their ability to learn.

Policies and environments that contribute to an increase in physical activity behaviors among youth include:

- Incorporating movement into existing and new classroom lessons
- A formal commitment from school staff and administrators to make physical activity a priority
- Providing and protecting daily recess time for all students
- Provide all students, pre-kindergarten through grade 12, with quality daily physical education that helps develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors needed to be physically active for life¹

Additional information is available in the report

Shaping Youth Behavior: Impact of School Environments on Physical Activity and Food Choices at:

www.maine-nutrition.org

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Action Steps

- Work with state-level policy groups to propose legislation that supports daily PE and daily PA at school consistent with national recommendations
- Review and revise, if needed, school wellness policies to be sure that they include specific language that supports opportunities for all students to be active everyday during school and post the policy around the school where students and staff are reminded of it
- Tap into national PE and PA programs and curriculums that are specifically designed to support teachers and administrators in providing opportunities for students to be active everyday (see the links on the bottom of this page)
- Work with local school boards and student groups to make improvements in the school's physical environment to make it more conducive to being active (i.e. more bike racks, safe sidewalks, campus perimeter trails, open gym time, etc.)

Resources

- AAHPERD -- American Association for Health Physical Education Recreation and Dance is an alliance of five national associations, six district associations, and a research consortium which support healthy lifestyles through high quality programs.
<http://www.aahperd.org/index.cfm>
- CDC--Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity.
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/>
- National Association for Health and Fitness -- A Network of State and Governor's Councils, NAHF is a non-profit organization that exists to improve the quality of life for individuals in the United States through the promotion of physical fitness, sports and healthy lifestyles.
<http://www.physicalfitness.org/>
- Take Time! Program is a school-based policy program designed to increase time students are active each day during school.
<http://www.maine-nutrition.org/Projects/TakeTime.htm>
- PE Central is a Web site for health and physical education teachers, parents, and students.
<http://www.pecentral.org/>
- Team Nutrition -- United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service provides training grants for school and community support for healthy eating and physical activity.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/>

References

¹ US Department of Health and Human Services. "The Surgeon General's Call To Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity 2001" (Rockville, MD): US Department of Health and Human Service, Public Health Service, Office of the Surgeon General (2001)

² Strong WB, et al. Evidence Based Physical Activity for School Aged Youth. *Journal of Pediatrics*. June 2005. 146:6; 732-737.