

# Strategies for Physical Activity Promotion Beyond the Physical Education Classroom

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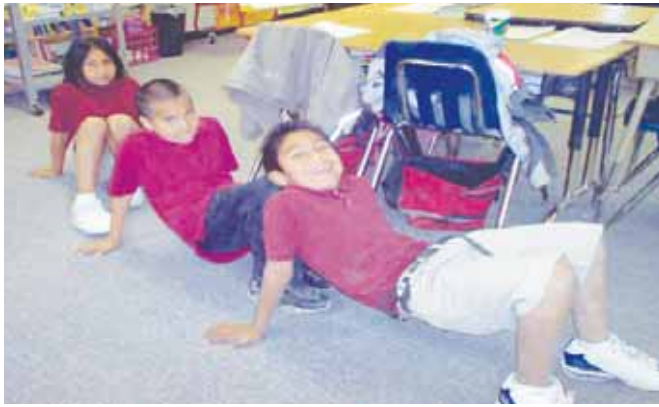
*Your physical education class may do a great job getting students active, but what about the other 23+ hours in the day?*

Much of the focus for physical education teachers relates to the curriculum and each individual lesson that is taught. It is important, however, to advocate for another aspect of the program that teachers are trying to promote: physical activity outside of the physical education classroom. With the limited amount of time for physical education, students cannot reach the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity (National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE], 2004b). To make up the difference, physical educators need to help promote, facilitate, and model opportunities for students to be active outside of class. The *Healthy People 2010* goals state that individuals should increase their daily physical activity levels and increase their quality of life through physical activity (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2000). These goals can be reached by combining the efforts of physical educators with the efforts of other school and community professionals. This article provides suggestions for physical educators to help students, their friends, and even their families to lead a physically active lifestyle and make healthy choices outside of the physical education program.

## Setting the Tone

Physical educators can be a positive influence on a student's level of participation in physical activity. A positive, motivating, success-oriented, nonthreatening, active school environment helps to create a solid foundation for students. Sallis and McKenzie (1991) argued that students who are positively motivated in physical education can be influenced to adopt a physically active lifestyle as adults, and for this approach they coined the term "health-related physical education." Their article launched an array of research studies supporting the link between physical education and physical activity outside of school (Wallhead & Buckworth, 2004). This topic, along with perceived competence in activity, continues to be examined for stronger links between physical education in school and physical activity outside of school. Gordon-Larsen, McMurray, and Popkin (2000) reported, for example, that participation in physical education led to an increase overall in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity participation. Beyond motivating physical education students and helping them to increase their perceived competence as movers, physical educators must set the tone and provide opportunities for activity outside of physical education programs (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 1997).

The following teacher- and school-level strategies will help to bridge the gap between what physical educators teach in physical education and how active children are outside of the physical education program.



Teachers should be encouraged to offer brief activity breaks within the school classroom.

## Teacher-Level Strategies

*Teacher Cooperation.* Classroom teachers and other school personnel need to realize that developing healthy and active students is a school-wide effort. Participating on the wellness committee at school and being in communication with classroom teachers, food service personnel, administrators, and curricular specialists can serve this purpose (Castelli & Beighle, 2007). The other teachers in the school should be informed about the goals and benefits of the physical education program, and about the benefits of physical activity breaks and of integrating health knowledge into other subjects. Teachers should be encouraged to provide three- to five-minute activity breaks during the school day (e.g., jumping rope in place without a rope, animal walks around the room, partner and mass stand up). Maeda and Murata (2004) offer a good guide to implementation of such activity breaks. Teachers also need to be informed of the national VERB campaign to get students active every day ([www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign/index.htm)) and provided with a booklet of activity break ideas. The principal could even present some of these activities at staff meetings (Darst & Pangrazi, 2006; Pangrazi, 2007).

Teachers could implement physical activities and health knowledge into a vast number of cross-curricular subjects inside the classroom (reverse integration). Teaching physical activity and health content may include, for example, using pedometers, predictions, ratios, graphs, fractions, and other statistical applications in math class. Physical activity and health content can also be the subject for composition material or social studies (e.g., tracking steps across the state). In addition, science lessons can focus on energy expenditure or the body's adaptation to increased activity, as well as other health issues.

Resources are available to support the integration of physical activity and wellness knowledge into the classroom, such as the "AZ Blue" walking program from Blue Cross Arizona. A more comprehensive program for a healthy and active school can be created following the sample policy of the National Association of State Boards of Education (e.g., Arizona Department of Education, 2004; Satcher, 2005) and the Active and

Healthy Schools Program ([www.activeandhealthy.com](http://www.activeandhealthy.com)).

*Community Involvement.* Teachers and school personnel need to work together to fight the obesity epidemic and create healthy and active school communities. They also need to involve the community (Lambdin & Erwin, 2007). Teachers may have opportunities to build or expand partnerships with local physical activity and wellness programs to create opportunities for students to be active outside of school. Community programs extend to a large segment of the population in a cost-effective manner and provide opportunities to promote activity among children (Welk, 1999). Health research has shown that having recreational equipment at home, as well as recreational facilities or trails nearby, can promote physical activity participation (Humpel, Owen, & Leslie, 2002). Being involved in community planning, or becoming a spokesperson when new or restructuring projects occur, can have a large impact on students and the community. Access to facilities, such as bike paths, parks, or playgrounds, can be a targeted improvement goal. Promoting or fundraising for more trails along water canals or railroad tracks that are being removed can provide many miles of activity opportunities.

*National Resources.* National resources are also available to support teachers' efforts to promote physical activity outside of the school setting, including materials from the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports ([www.presidentschallenge.org](http://www.presidentschallenge.org)). This organization provides online opportunities for students to track their own physical activity patterns and incentives to encourage student participation. Since students have limited opportunities to be active in physical education class, participating in these programs may encourage them to engage in additional activities on their own or with friends or family members. Students document their activity on program forms that can be tracked and lead to acknowledgment of their participation. The acknowledgment of their physically active behaviors may help them to develop intrinsic motivation that will eventually produce lifelong physical activity patterns.

*Develop an Incentive Program.* Instead of using national tracking programs or resources, physical education teachers can also create their own incentive program to get students involved in out-of-school physical activities. Students can accumulate points that are redeemable for prizes from local businesses, or earn activity field trips to a water park, ski slope, indoor climbing facility, or other places that may be available or of special interest in a particular area. School hikes, bike rides, and Jump Rope/Hoops for Heart can encourage participation. The teacher can set his or her own requirements for how long or how often the students need to engage in physical activity and have them document their time spent participating in physical activity so they can achieve their reward at the end of the quarter, semester, or year.

*Journal Logs.* Teachers may want to add journals or homework to supplement their physical education programs. A well-balanced physical education program that adheres to NASPE's appropriate practices (e.g., elementary, NASPE, 2000)

gains credibility in the school system. Homework assigned for physical education class should no longer be considered out of the ordinary. Gabbei and Hamrick (2001) and Mitchell, Barton, and Stanne (2000) give numerous tips for implementing physical education homework. Also, many activity journals or log sheets are available and can be modified to fit a program's needs (e.g., Activitygram, [www.cooperinst.org/ftgmain.asp](http://www.cooperinst.org/ftgmain.asp)). Information about health benefits and long-term outcomes from physical activity can also be a part of the homework assignments or logs. Optional extra-credit assignments can be given if an activity is done with a family member or a friend, to help promote physical activity in the community and family (Darst, 2001). Of course, teachers need to be aware of possible student exaggerations and "studentship" behaviors such as fronting or faking desirable behaviors (Graber, 1991).

*Modeling.* In addition to providing students with physical activity opportunities, it is also important to model healthy and active behaviors. If physical educators do not put into practice the content they are teaching, they will not have a strong influence on students. "More is caught than taught" and "they learn more from what we do than what we say" are common phrases used in education and parenting (Abramovitch & Grusex, 1978). The students need to see physical educators living physically active and healthy lifestyles. When physical educators demonstrate to students that they practice what they preach, students will be more likely to follow their example.

## School-Level Strategies

*Age-appropriate Playground Equipment and Play Spaces.* Equipment, whether a fixed structure or consumable, needs to be age-appropriate for students. When students have equipment that fits and interests them, activity levels increase and problems decrease (Hudson, 2005). Consumable equipment (balls, hoops, ropes, etc.) needs to be available to support physical activity before and after school as well as during recess breaks. It is suggested that at least one piece of equipment should be available during a recess break for every 10 students (Hudson, 2005).

Introducing a variety of activities in physical education will give students the confidence to participate in a variety of activities outside of class. Among the possibilities are to mark age-appropriate play spaces for recreational games such as four square or hopscotch; provide areas for long or short jump ropes; provide bars for pulling, hanging, and swinging and poles for tether ball; or provide equipment for bowling and map games. Allotting larger areas for exercise trails and games of soccer, kickball, "Ultimate," and "Disc Golf" will enable students to engage in those activities. Predetermined areas can be set up by grade level with cones, poly spots, or paint. Mesa Public Schools in Mesa, Arizona, uses signs to mark semi-structured activities, and they have "activity zones" at which all students are required to participate in one of the activities rather than being sedentary during recess. If there is a wide variety of age-appropriate games and



Creating before- or after-school programs, such as this simple game of Ultimate, would increase students' opportunities for physical activity.

activities for every skill level, no one will be left out. When restructuring play areas or purchasing new equipment, the physical educator may also act as a consultant for the school on equipment purchases, layout, and safety design (Thompson, Hudson, & Mack, 1998).

*Before-School, Lunch-Break, and After-School Programming.* A walking and jogging club can give school-aged children more opportunities and choices for activity outside of physical education classes without the need for extra playground equipment. Walking and jogging clubs may help improve children's ability to sustain continuous jogging and walking, identify walking and jogging as cardiovascular exercise, and participate in daily walking and jogging outside of class (Ratliff & Bostick, 2001). Trails or tracks can be created around the playground or school area. Students could record distance, time, and—if pedometers are available—the number of steps they take. Teachers can give the students lap cards for their personal records. Teachers could set specific challenges for their students, such as a specific distance to be achieved, total time spent, or a certain number of recorded steps. A club can be a wonderful opportunity to develop healthy habits outside of physical education classes. The clubs need not be limited to students; involving teachers and family members can increase the likelihood of student involvement.

In addition to adding walking and jogging programs, other types of activities or noncompetitive games can offer more opportunities for students to be active. Age groups can be separated for specific activities or games, and peer-tutoring can be used with proper training. Curricula can be designed to meet the specific needs of the school, children, and environment, or national programs like Sports, Play, and Active Recreation for Kids (SPARK, [www.sparkpe.org](http://www.sparkpe.org)) can be implemented. Because a large number of children today come from families with two working parents, or from single-parent homes, they may need after-school programming (Graham, 2006).

*Promotions and Announcements.* In addition to providing more physical activity opportunities on site, schools can also provide and post information about community physical-activity opportunities and sporting events (e.g., road races, hikes, orienteering courses, maps showing bike trails). Bulletin boards and newsletters can also provide activity tips, advice, or current research articles (Darst, 2001) and can be

used throughout the school as a reminder for students; these prompts can be moved to various locations across the school campus so that all students get the chance to see them.

Additional exposure given to physical activity opportunities demonstrates the importance that schools place on physical activity and health, and it will often lead to increased participation. In addition, national organizations recommend student mastery in many motor activities and behaviors, because the confidence gained from such mastery contributes to increased physical-activity participation overall (CDC, 1997; NASPE, 2004a).

*Family Nights.* Another way for schools to demonstrate support for physical activity and health outcomes for their students is to offer activities that promote health, nutrition, and physical activity during family nights, parent-teacher conferences, or other school events. Families are a great—though often overlooked—social support system for developing healthy behaviors (Morgan & Morgan, 2004). A family night of physical activity can promote the physical education program as well as physical activity outside of school. When family members and others are introduced to the components of the physical education program and the goals the program is trying to achieve, further support for the program and encouragement for outside-of-school physical activity participation often results (Morgan & Morgan, 2004).

*Food Services.* Providing healthy, well presented food at school events and school meals also sends a message to students and their families that the health and wellness of students is important. Schools that follow nutritional guidelines established by the CDC have reported more student participation in physical activities and less participation in sedentary activities (Veugelers & Fitzgerald, 2005). Proper food choices will provide better sources of energy to aid in the physical and mental functioning of students and can potentially lead students to develop good health and wellness habits (Welk, 1999). Many programs and guidelines exist for eating well and for recommended nutritional intake (e.g., [www.Mypyramid.gov](http://www.Mypyramid.gov)). Physical education teachers and other school personnel working together with the food service personnel can be a key element in the development of healthy and active schools (Jefferies & Mathias, 2007). Mesa Public Schools in Arizona puts nutrition stickers with slogans (e.g., “eat smart,” “we’re good for you”) on good food choices, and the teachers also review students’ bag lunches and give nutrition stickers to students who bring healthy lunches. School districts also may want to monitor treats brought into the classroom for parties and birthdays and provide parents with healthy treat guidelines. Age-appropriate guidelines for competitive foods and beverages in the schools can be found on the web site of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation ([www.healthiergeneration.org/engine/renderpage.asp?pid=s017](http://www.healthiergeneration.org/engine/renderpage.asp?pid=s017)).

The authors hope that one, some, or all of these teacher- and school-level strategy ideas will help school personnel to increase school- and community-based programming to support physical activity outside of physical education

programs and healthy lifestyle behaviors. This may lead to students adopting or enhancing a healthy and active lifestyle and maintaining these behaviors into adulthood.

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~~It is always better to be proactive than reactive in dealing with a health threat.~~

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