



Your Goals



On your feet! That is the rallying cry being sounded at schools across the nation as walking and running become part of the daily routine. After a decade of budget cutbacks for physical education, teachers have noticed a negative impact on their students' academic performance. And they're doing something about it.

We spoke with organizers of some of the best school walking and running programs in the United States—including a group of former Olympic athletes—and asked how they did it. Time and again we heard how easy (and cheap!) it was to get started. Read on to find out their tips for success.

Jump Start the Day

Students at Clymer Central School, in rural western New York, ride the bus an average of 50 minutes to get to school. That's a lot of sitting before the day even starts. "We were trying to find ways to fight obesity," recalls Irvin King, phys ed teacher at the K-12 school. "So we had the idea of getting kids walking as soon as they got off the bus."

Two teachers volunteer for 20 minutes each morning to supervise the program. As music plays, walkers do a loop around the inside perimeter of the gym and runners take the outside. King says it took about a month to hammer out the details—getting permission slips, having everyone wear sneakers. Six years later, the program practically runs itself, and more than 200 of the 244 students take part.

Clymer fourth-grade teacher Pamela Morton helps out every

No Gym Required

Lace up your sneakers and start a walking program in your school today! *By Caralee Adams*

PHOTO: PETE MCARTHUR/CORBIS



Give kids a writing prompt to mull over while they walk. They'll return with great ideas.

Monday. Before, her students were wound up when they came to class in the morning. "This takes care of it," she says. "They can settle right in because they've had time to socialize and get all that willy-nillyness out."

At Caldwell Heights Elementary School in Round Rock, Texas, phys ed teachers Charly Brown and Sandy DiBari have been running JAWS (Jogging and Walking Superstars) as their "morning duty" for 13 years. They invite students, and their families, to join them on the track before school for 20 minutes. "They don't have to sign up. They can just come," says Brown. "The rule is, they have to jog the first lap. They think they can't do it."

Many realize that they can. The "marathon kids" at Caldwell aim to log 26.2 miles over time; about 100 students do so every year. Their P.E. teachers recognize the achievement with a "circle of honor" at the beginning of gym class. "It's a big deal to them," says Brown.

Carve Out Class Time

The drawback of a voluntary program is that the kids who most need the exercise may be the least likely to seek it out. Making a walking program part of the school day gets everyone moving, says Robert Sweetgall, whose 11,000-mile walking trek across all 50 states in the mid-eighties kicked off a career as a walking and wellness guru.

Sweetgall suggests starting the day with a 10-minute walk around the school grounds after kids arrive. "Make the walk a time for kids to talk with their friends and for you to get one-on-one time with them," he says.

Give students a writing prompt to mull over while they walk, and tell them they'll have 10 minutes to write when they get back. They often return to the classroom with great ideas and in a better mood. "Walking is underrated," says Sweetgall. "It improves every part of the body."

Make Sport of It

Olympic gold medalist Micki King suggests tapping into kids' competitive spirit. She's on the board of World Fit (Olympians for Worldwide Fitness), which encourages former Olympic athletes to oversee a school walking program. (King works with 11 schools

in Lexington, Kentucky.) The athletes encourage kids to walk 40 minutes a day over the course of six weeks.

Usually, the 40 minutes comes in two 20-minute blocks taken from home-room, lunchtime, and parts of elective classes (but not from core classes, or from time before or after school). At first, Lynn Schaffer, a sixth-grade teacher at Beaumont Middle School in Lexington, didn't know how the program would fit into her science class, but she found a way. "The break is great for the kids," she says.

Students track their miles online and compete for awards locally and nationally. There's no cost to the school, other than teacher time. "It's sustainable, affordable, and doable," says King. The program expanded from 42 middle schools in 2011 to 80 this year.

Keep Them Moving

At California's San Ysidro Middle School seventh graders wear pedometers 24-7. Well, almost—students take them off when they shower and before going to bed. The Walkinator program was the brainchild of P.E. teachers Laura Duehring and Dee Connaghan, and is part of the curriculum. "We didn't have any resistance; they were thrilled about it," Duehring says.

Kids log their pedometer results online and engage in competitions for the most steps taken. Winners are recognized with prizes such as a pass on wearing their school uniform for a day. The program has spurred a higher level of activity, says Duehring. Students are walking more at lunchtime, and all those extra steps add up. The school found significant improvements in seventh graders' body mass index over the course of the year.

Tap Into Community

Parents have organized walking and running clubs as well. In 2009, Kathleen Tullie was inspired to bring exercise to her own children's school, Memorial Elementary, in Natick,

PHOTO: GEOFF MANASSE/MEDIA BAKERY



FITNESS

Massachusetts, so she organized local moms and dads to make the before-school fitness program a reality. Looking for a company to sponsor T-shirts, she turned to Reebok. That conversation led to the birth of BOKS (Build Our Kids' Success), and Tullie is now taking the program nationwide.

Each 40-minute before-school session consists of a warm-up period, a running activity, a "skill of the week" such as push-ups or sit-ups, a quick game, and a cooldown period. In the suburbs,

Tullie says, "ninety percent of these programs are run by parents. They are the advocates; they are the trainers. And they are the ones who are bringing it to the schools." That's proved a little trickier in urban areas, where parents make up only 15 percent of the program volunteers. "The other 85 percent are teachers," says Tullie.

At Nottingham Elementary School in Arlington, Virginia, PTA volunteer Joanne Guerrero oversees Knights in Motion every Friday. During recess,

students from first through fifth grade walk or run around a quarter-mile course that Guerrero has marked off with orange cones. The kids track their mileage by punching holes in index cards or adding plastic tokens to a bracelet or key chain.

"There are kids who are competitive runners timing themselves, there are girls holding hands and chatting, and there are even students who pass the soccer ball to each other the entire time," says Guerrero.

PHOTO: HEIN VAN DEN HEUVEL/CORBIS

Partner Up!

Want to start your own program? You don't have to do it alone. These groups provide grants, materials, and good old motivation.

World Fit

Former Olympians across the country have worked together to launch this free walking program for grades 3–12. Each athlete adopts a school and oversees a six-week program that encourages classes to walk together throughout the school day. Students can log their miles online. worldfit.org

Just Run

This Web-based initiative comes out of the Big Sur International Marathon's youth running program. Teacher materials for grades 2–12, as well as training videos on coaching, are available online. Classes can compare their progress with the rest of the state or the nation. justrun.org

Creative Walking

Robert Sweetgall specializes in custom walking and wellness programs. He has written numerous books, including *The Walking Wellness Student Workbook*, and conducts motivational workshops. Check out his website for educational resources and motivational tips. creativewalking.com

BOKS

Kathleen Tullie and her legion of moms started the nonprofit as a way to get kids active before school. BOKS provides parents with a free curriculum of activities and other resources via its website, including nutritional tips for kids, called "BOKS bits." bokskids.org

However it's organized—by parents, by teachers, by community volunteers, by former Olympians—starting a running or walking program at your school shouldn't be a hard sell, to the kids or the adults watching over them.

"I love the confidence that it gives kids," says Tullie. "Any mom or dad in the country would love to hear you say you could do something to make their child happier, more confident, more attentive. And our polling shows these programs do just that." □



Alliance for a Healthier Generation

Visit the website for more on the national Healthy Schools program, and to find materials on fitness programs, healthy eating strategies, and wellness plans. Be inspired by students and teachers who are making healthy changes!
healthiergeneration.org

ING Run for Something Better

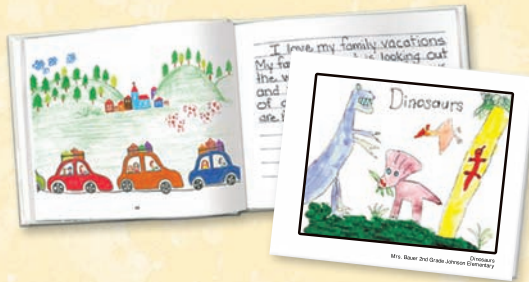
The focus of ING's initiative is on helping kids become fit through free, school-based running fitness programs. Grants are available to schools to sponsor events and provide supporting materials.
ingrfsb.com



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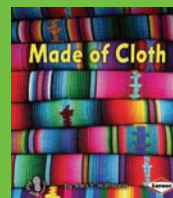
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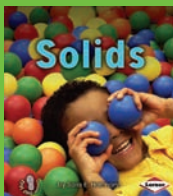
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