



Action for Healthy Kids®

Action for Healthy Kids™
of Alabama

GUIDE TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY in schools



A physically active lifestyle adopted early in life may continue into adulthood. Schools can provide environments with opportunities for learning and practicing active lifestyle behaviors.

The lack of meaningful physical activity by today's children has become a major health risk. Many school systems no longer have scheduled recess; the vast majority of children travel to school by car or bus - only 13% of children walk or bike to school. In Alabama only 33.3% of students attend physical education (PE) class daily. Conditions related to their sedentary lifestyles, including diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, depression, and anxiety are increasing in children and are having a negative impact on school performance. Prevention is the key to fighting these chronic diseases says U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson, and helping students increase physical activity is one way to put prevention into action. Because children spend most of their time in school the type and amount of physical activity encouraged in schools are important.

New physical activity guidelines from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education include recommendations for at least 60 minutes and up to several hours of physical activity per day for children 5 - 12 years of age. Further: "children should participate in several bouts of physical activity lasting 15 minutes or more each day, discouraging periods of 2 hours or more of inactivity, especially during the daytime hours." The American Academy of Pediatrics supports the efforts of schools to include increased physical activity in the curriculum as does the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

With increasing evidence that physical activity supports learning and in a time when physical education requirements are in decline, school programs can promote physically active lifestyles for pre-adolescent children by incorporating activity in the school environment in the following ways:

- ▶ Provide time during the school day for a quality PE program.
- ▶ Schedule an activity break after lunch
- ▶ Provide extracurricular programs e.g. walking clubs, jumping rope, in-line skating.
- ▶ Sponsor parent-child activity programs at school.
- ▶ Encourage teachers to provide time for unstructured physical activity during recess.
- ▶ Provide quality, accessible PE classes and physical activity opportunities for children with disabilities.
- ▶ Allow access to facilities before and after school hours and during vacation periods.
- ▶ Encourage safe walking and biking to and from school.
- ▶ Plan fitness breaks: periodic 5 minute aerobic activities to break up the school day.
- ▶ Coordinate physical activities with community agencies, allowing use of school facilities to facilitate training programs for volunteer youth coaches.
- ▶ Provide a listing of community physical activity resources to students and parents.
- ▶ Provide students and teachers with physical and social environments that encourage and enable physical activity.
- ▶ Encourage and enable school personnel to be active role models by their own participation in physical activity.

WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Teachers with positive attitudes about physical activity, e.g. physical activity is fun and important, are an important influence for young people.

- ▶ Be active role models:
 - Walk the stairs.
 - Walk during lunch hour and/or after school hours.
 - Join in the fun with the kids on the playground or gym.
 - Talk about physical activities you like to do outside of school.
 - Participate in school-based health promotion programs.
- ▶ Encourage and enable parental involvement in physical activity.
- ▶ Send home activity homework that parents and children can do together.
- ▶ Encourage Walk to School programs.
- ▶ Classroom activities:
 - Take stretch breaks: “touch your toes”, jog in place to music.
 - March while reciting multiplication tables.
 - Display posters, banners, etc, with physical activity themes.
- ▶ Ask the librarian to prepare a book display and list of books about various physical activities and sports.
- ▶ Incorporate physical activity in other subjects such as math and science and geography.

MATH: Have students practice their measurement skills by measuring the distance covered when jumping, leaping and hopping. Jumping jacks: call out a math problem. If the answer is less than 20, ask students to give their answer in jumping jacks.

SCIENCE: Encourage students to do reports on the benefits of physical activity. Take nature walks.

LANGUAGE ARTS: Ask students to record in their journals the amount of time they spend watching TV and being physically active - and what activities they enjoyed most and why.

SPELLING: Host a spelling bee with a physical activity theme. Ask students to act out verbs such as skip, hop and march.

GEOGRAPHY: Rhythmic Activity: “Body, Mind, Map” uses the body as a model of the globe: North Pole: touch head
South Pole: touch toes
Equator: hands around waist
America: left hand
Europe: nose, etc.
(Source: www.PElinks4U.org)

PEDOMETERS IN THE CLASSROOM SETTING:

Motivate movement.
Track progress with a daily log.
Develop goal setting skills.
Idea: Suggest a school-wide step contest.
Resource: www.Pecentral.org/pedometry/teachertools/teachertools

ACTIVITY OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES:

Enhance functional living skills, improve health-related factors, enhance social skills and increase independence.
Resources:
www.nichcy.org (National Information Center for Children and Youth With Disabilities)
www.boundlessplaygrounds.org (Boundless Playgrounds)
www.ncpad.org (National Center on Physical Activity and Disability)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

www.nrpa.org (National Recreation and Parks Association)
www.fitness.gov (President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sport)
www.pe.links4u.org (The Children’s Health Fund)
www.PEcentral.org/pedometry/teachertools/teahcertools
www.aahperd.org (American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance)
www.alsde.edu (Alabama Department of Education)
www.naspe.org (National Association for Sport and Physical Education)

For more information and to see guides on other topics, visit the Alabama section of the Action for Healthy Kids Website:

www.actionforhealthykids.org

For additional copies of this document or questions, call the Alabama Department of Public Health Nutrition and Physical Activity Unit.

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