

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



Only 18% of Alaska high school youth get the daily recommended amount of Physical Activity of 60 minutes every day.

What Does Physical Activity Look Like in a School?

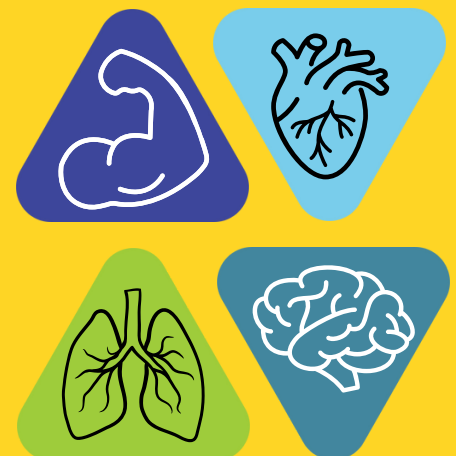
Physical Activity is a critical component of a healthy school. While the terms Physical Activity (PA) and Physical Education (PE) are sometimes used interchangeably, there are important distinctions between the two and both have important and interrelated roles in creating a healthy school community. Physical activity encompasses any bodily movement, ranging from structured activities such as organized sports and fitness, to daily activities such as walking or taking the stairs. Physical Education provides an opportunity for students to develop knowledge, skills, and behaviors for active living and physical fitness. Part of a school offering comprehensive physical activity includes a robust PE program. Using a planned, sequential K-12 standards based program, schools can integrate physical activity into the school day.

Physical activity of any type has numerous benefits for overall well being. However, the intensity of activity is an important factor in order to achieve certain health benefits, such as building strong bones and improving cardiovascular fitness. The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommends that students engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day. Consider these definitions and examples when assessing physical activity opportunities at your school.

Light Physical Activity	Moderate Physical Activity	Vigorous Physical Activity
Requires standing up and moving around, at a low intensity.	Requires some effort, but it is still relatively feasible to talk while doing the activity.	Requires a large amount of effort, resulting in rapid breathing and increased heart rate.
Examples: engaging in a classroom activity while standing; walking to a locker or down hallways	Examples: walking quickly to catch the bus; bicycling around the neighborhood or park; PE class	Examples: extended running on the playground; playing basketball; PE class

Risks of Physical Inactivity

Physical activity habits are formed in childhood and adolescence. These habits can impact health now and in adulthood. Physical inactivity in adulthood is linked to numerous physical, psychological, and social health issues, such as an increased risk of stroke, diabetes, anxiety, and depression.



Benefits of Physical Activity

All students benefit from physical activity. Therefore, it is important to cultivate an inclusive environment that creates a safe space for students of different abilities and backgrounds to participate in physical activity. The benefits of physical activity include:

- Improved concentration, memory, and classroom behavior
- Lower levels of stress and anxiety, better sleep outcomes
- Stronger sense of social connectedness
- Motor skill development
- Reduced risk factors for chronic diseases such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes
- Improved standardized test scores

Physical Activity Benefits Mental Health

Research shows that physical activity helps to build strong bones and muscles, improves cardiorespiratory fitness (healthy heart and lungs), and helps to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. Physical activity is a natural mood booster. Movement releases chemicals in the body that improve mood, help us concentrate, and relieve stress.



High school students in Alaska who report getting 60 minutes of daily physical activity for five or more days per week are less likely to experience mental health issues than their peers.



Alaska youth who get five or more days of physical activity per week compared to Alaska youth who do not are significantly:

- More likely to report being able to control their emotions when they needed to (74% v 59%)
- Less likely to report having anxiety (29% v 38%)
- Less likely to report feeling alone in life (27% v 36%)
- Less likely to make a suicide attempt (15% v 22%)

2023 YRBS

Schools Can Increase Physical Activity

Physical activity opportunities will look different for each school community and should be constructed to complement the unique assets and needs of a school community.

- Design a comprehensive physical activity program that offers opportunities throughout the school day, including: before school, after school, and during class time.
- Create opportunities for the entire school community, including school staff and families, to participate in physical activity as a part of events or school physical activity challenges.
- Establish and maintain clear, consistent, and inclusive policies for PE classes and recess.
- Identify and support the education and training of physical activity champions in your school.



www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/PEandPA

**Active Students
=
Better Learners**

What Should Schools STOP Doing?

The following approaches should be avoided because research indicates they are ineffective, and moreover, can result in a negative association with physical activity.

- Using or withholding physical activity as a form of punishment and/or for behavior management.
- Using fitness testing towards a student's grade in PE class.

Alaska and National Data

From Students:

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) administered by CDC is completed by high school students to monitor health-related behaviors, including physical activity, that contribute to the leading causes of death and disability among youth and adults.

- Only 18% of Alaska high school youth get the daily recommended amount of Physical Activity of minutes 60 per day every day.
- 18% of Alaska high school youth walk or ride their bike to school or home three or more days a week.

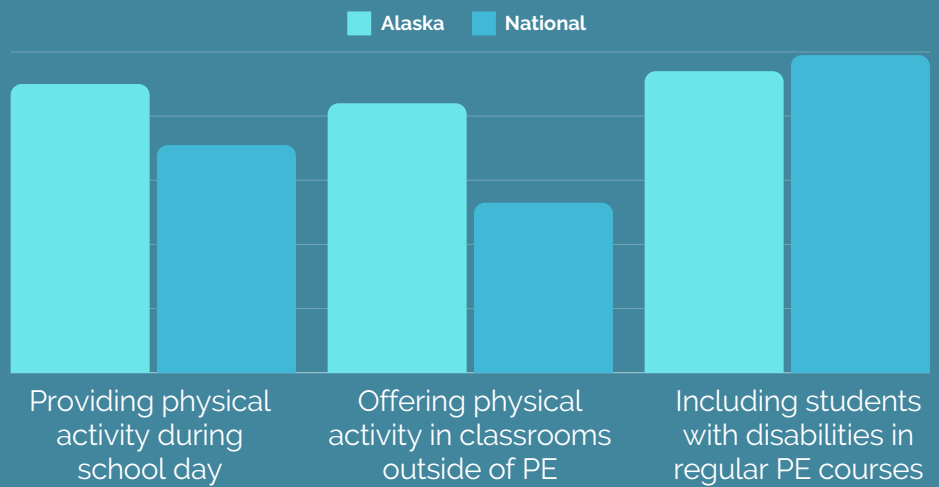
From Principals:

The School Health Profiles survey administered by the CDC is taken by middle and high school principals and lead health education teachers to assess school health policies and practices nationwide.

Strengths

Alaska principals report that their schools either significantly exceed or closely trail national averages in the following areas:

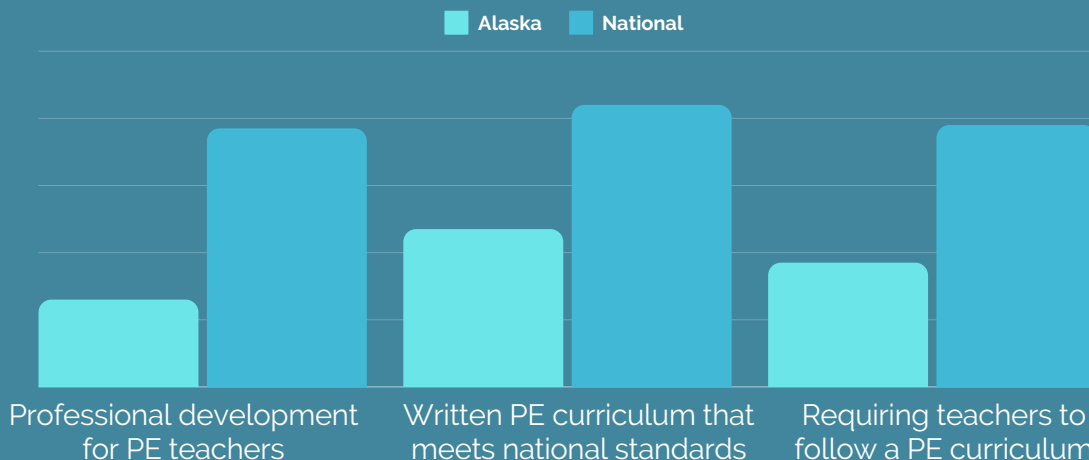
- Providing physical activity opportunities during the school day (90% vs 71%)
- Offering physical activity opportunities in classrooms outside of physical education (84% vs 53%)
- Including students with disabilities in regular physical education courses (94% vs 99%)



Opportunities for Improvement

Alaska principals report that their schools have lower percentages compared to national averages in:

- Professional development for physical education teachers (26% vs. 77%)
- Providing a written PE curriculum that meets national standards (48% vs. 84%)
- Requiring teachers to follow a PE curriculum (38% vs. 78%)



CDC Healthy Schools



Summary of State School Physical Education (PE) and Physical Activity (PA) Data*†

Physical Education



48% of secondary schools
Provided a written
PE curriculum



47% of secondary schools
Did not allow waivers,
exemptions, or
substitutions for PE

Physical Activity Before School



46% of secondary schools
Offered PA
before school

Physical Activity During School



90% of secondary schools
Offered PA during
school (e.g., recess,
lunchtime intramurals)

Infrastructure for a CSPAP‡



20% of secondary schools
Had a written plan
for PA before, during,
and after school

Family & Community Engagement



41% of secondary schools
Involved parents as
school volunteers in
PE or PA programs

High School Students

Did exercises to strengthen or tone muscles
on ≥ 3 days



Were physically active for a total of ≥ 60 minutes
per day on all 7 days



Attended physical education classes on all 5 days



Played on ≥ 1 sports team



* 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data presented on the first and second pages.

† 2022 School Health Profiles (Profiles) data presented on the first page. 2020 and 2022 data presented on the second page.

‡ Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program.

N/A or — means that item was not included on the state survey.



Physical Activity and the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model

The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model is designed to guide all school community

partners to collaboratively address health behaviors and create environments that promote health and wellness for students by integrating the ten component areas. Through this interconnected and collaborative approach, the WSCC model aims to support the whole child to be healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

For any given health issue at any given school, the resources and involvement of each component area may vary. In regard to this health issue, Physical Environment, Social & Emotional Climate, and Physical Education & Physical Activity may be more involved in increasing PA in schools.

Example strategies for aligning and coordinating physical activity-specific practices across the ten WSCC component areas:

Community Involvement

- Create a joint use agreement with community partners to provide access to indoor and outdoor PA facilities.
- Provide access to outdoor recreation spaces on school campuses outside of school hours.
- Partner with local community groups to offer culturally relevant physical activity programs (e.g. traditional dance or drumming groups, Native Youth Olympics, culture camps or programs supporting fishing, hunting, or gathering food for subsistence).

Family Engagement

- Host regular physical activity clubs for parents and children at school (e.g. dance classes, group fitness, run-walk groups/teams).
- Involve families through PA "homework" that encourages movement in the home.
- Create opportunities for PA during school events for adults to model incorporating PA into daily routines.

Employee Wellness

- Conduct PA challenges and other fitness programs for staff and students.
- Serve as a role model to students by participating in daily PA at school (e.g. classroom brain breaks, recess, schoolwide events).
- Utilize PA incentives offered by health insurance providers (e.g. fitbits, discounted gym memberships, free health screenings).

Physical Environment

- Apply markings on the playground that encourage children to be active during recess (e.g. hopscotch, squares, walking paths).
- Create infrastructure to support PA opportunities in and around school facilities (e.g. install bike racks to encourage bicycling to school, designate safe routes to school to promote walking to school).

- Ensure students of all abilities and identities can participate by creating activity spaces that are accessible and inclusive (e.g. private, gender neutral locker rooms; sensory play options; adaptive equipment).

Health Education

- Incorporate skills-based lessons and PA in the classroom to teach health literacy content.

- Teach students strategies to overcome social barriers to PA.

Nutrition Environment & Services

- Adjust the master schedule to allow for recess before lunch.
- Include physical activity goals such as PA and PE minutes in the local school wellness policy (Student Nutrition and Physical Activity BP 5040) and monitor as part of ongoing triennial review.
- Communicate messages about fueling the body with healthy foods for PA and optimal performance.

Health Services

- Involve school health professionals in the promotion of PA programs.
- Support students with special health care needs and chronic health conditions to be physically active (e.g. medication management for students with asthma or diabetes).

Counseling, Psychological, & Social Services

- Involve school counseling services in communication and leadership decisions with school wellness team.
- Create gender affirming PE/PA opportunities.
- Provide PA opportunities to support students regulating their emotions, support students in overcoming possible barriers to PA participation.
- Provide PA equipment in the counseling office (e.g. jump rope, hula hoop).
- Educate students on the benefits of PA to improve mood and reduce stress.

Social & Emotional Climate

- Incorporate PA into social-emotional skill building & practice opportunities (e.g. meetings, or walking during classroom lessons.)



Resources

When considering prevention and intervention strategies, it is important to implement policies and programs that are proven to be effective in school settings. The programs highlighted below are comprehensive, operate at the universal prevention and intervention levels, and are aligned with the WSCC model.

Playworks:

(GRADES PreK-8) Playworks is a program grounded in the idea that recess matters and can be utilized in a thoughtful way to improve students' social, emotional and physical health. Playworks collaborates with schools to train staff or provide recess coaches to facilitate healthy recess. Through the program, schools reimagine recess utilizing both old and new games to teach students about collaboration, choice, and leadership.

SPARK:

(GRADES K-12) SPARK programming encourages students to seek out and enjoy PA. It also supports students in the development of physical movement skills and teaches skills for cooperation among students in movement environments. The program offers curriculum for multiple settings in schools, including: PE, classroom instruction time, recess, and before and after school. SPARK offers teacher trainings and content-based equipment.



Active Schools:

(GRADES K-12) Active Schools believes that all youth should be educated in an active school to enhance learning, health, and well-being. Their mission is to ensure the integration of evidence-based physical activity programs that allow students to receive physical, social-emotional, and academic benefits. Some of the free tools and resources from Active Schools include:

- Foundational Documents that walk school communities through how to create and sustain an active school culture.
- Informative webinars about how to easily integrate more time for students to be physically active before, during, and after school.

OPEN:

(GRADES K-12) OPEN is an online resource that provides free lesson plans and curriculum modules for Physical Education grades K-12. In addition to the lessons, OPEN has a multitude of resources around creating an active classroom, active recess, and active home, and tools and printable documents for teachers to set them up for a successful school year.



Local and Culturally Relevant Resources

The following resources are unique to the state of Alaska and can play a role in promoting Alaska Native heritage. They not only enhance physical well-being but also connect students with traditional practices and the rich indigenous traditions of Alaska's culture.



Got Neqpiaq? Seasonal Activity Guide:

(PRE-K) The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium is partnering with several Head Start preschool programs administered by Rural Alaska Community Action Program to create a physical activity guide specific to preschool-age children in the Yukon Kuskokwim region. The guide will include activity descriptions, lesson plans, flash cards, and photos of traditional Alaska Native physical activities and games specific to the region.



Native Youth Olympics:

(GRADES 1-12, Separated by Junior and Senior Olympics) The Native Youth Olympics (NYO) celebrates and preserves Alaska Native traditions through athletic competition. The traditional athletic contests and games develop the strength used by generations of Alaska Native people who depended on these skills for survival in everyday life. This year-round program serves over 2,000 Alaska youth each year, positively impacting academic performance, health and well-being, and core values such as leadership, cooperation, and respect, all while strengthening local communities.

Culture Camps and Cultural Education Programs:

Organizations such as the [Arctic Education Foundation](#) sponsor cultural education programs to foster creative expression and strengthen youth's connection to traditional practices. Through various initiatives, including regional culture camps and workshops, the programs educate young people on subsistence hunting, traditional arts, and plant use. These programs help build community bonds, pass down cultural knowledge, and equip youth with essential skills related to their heritage. By engaging with local experts and learning traditional techniques, participants gain a deeper understanding of their culture and strengthen their ties to past generations.

Play Every Day:

Play Every Day is a public health education campaign to help Alaska children grow up to be a healthy weight. The program shares messages with families to encourage support in the home for children to get the recommended [daily physical activity](#), and to drink water instead of [sugary drinks](#). The campaign shares its messages through videos, online and print materials, and [social media](#), featuring images from rural communities, often in partnership with the [Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium](#). Schools and educators can also use the materials to emphasize the benefits of physical activity on student health.

Healthy Futures:

(GRADES K-6) Healthy Futures is an Alaska program with the goal of empowering Alaska's youth to build the habit of daily physical activity. This is accomplished through maintaining a Healthy Futures Activity Log and schools participating in the Activity Challenge, where students are incentivized and rewarded for being active. Healthy Futures also supports community events across the state that promote physical activity through sponsorship and advocacy.