

Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs: Helping All Students Achieve 60 Minutes of Physical Activity Each Day

Position

The American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD) recommends that all schools implement a comprehensive school physical activity program (CSPAP).

The Need for Physical Activity

Physical activity is important to the overall health and well-being of everyone, including all school-age children. The benefits of physical activity are well documented and include the mitigation of many health risks, including those for developing type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. Physical activity also contributes to the building and maintenance of healthy bones and muscles, improved health-related fitness, and positive social and mental health (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2008). While childhood obesity continues to be a top public health concern throughout the United States, physical activity is a proven critical tool for preventing and treating obesity and its related risk factors (Glickman, Parker, Sim, Cook, & Miller, 2012; U.S. White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity, 2010).

Also, an increasing body of scientific evidence suggests that healthier students are better learners and that physical activity can improve student academic achievement (e.g., grades, standardized test scores), as well as other factors that influence



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POSITION STATEMENT

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academic success in school (e.g., attention span, classroom behavior, attendance; Active Living Research, 2007; Basch, 2010; Hillman et al., 2009; Trudeau & Shephard, 2008; USDHHS, 2010a).

In 2008, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released the first comprehensive guidelines on physical activity for all Americans, and included key recommendations for children and adolescents. In concert with recommendations from AAHPERD and other leading public health, medical, and education organizations and researchers, USDHHS recommended that children and adolescents should be physically active at least 60 minutes daily, and should participate in activities that are mostly moderate to vigorous in intensity and that are muscle- and bone-strengthening (American Academy of Pediatrics,

2008; Glickman et al., 2012; National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE], 2004; Strong et al., 2005; USDHHS, 2008). Examples include brisk walking, jogging, jumping rope, and many other activities through which students increase their respiration rate or heart rate, or would become fatigued after engaging in the activity for several minutes. AAHPERD also recommends activities that provide skill-development opportunities.

Physical activity programs in schools should help all children—regardless of ability or developmental level—meet these national recommendations, and schools must make accommodations, when possible, to ensure the safety of and appropriate environment for all students. Schools should provide students with opportunities to:

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- Learn the skills that they need to become competent movers;
- View physical activity as important and enjoyable;
- Become confident in participating in physical activity; and
- Discover physical activities that cultivate the habits that lead to being active for a lifetime (USDHHS, 2010b).

The Role of Schools in Providing Physical Activity

Schools are in an ideal position to influence children's health through improved physical activity participation, because school is where most children spend the majority of their time outside the home. Consistent messages and opportunities for physical activity across the school environment that encourage and reinforce similar actions in the community and home settings are critical to meeting the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity each day and to influencing health-related behaviors (Glickman et al., 2012; Kaplan, Liverman, & Kraak, 2005; Pate et al., 2006).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's *Healthy People 2020* national objectives call for schools to increase the proportion of students who meet these physical activity guidelines, and who participate in daily physical education and other physical activity opportunities such as recess, after-school activities, and active transport (USDHHS, 2010b). The National Physical Activity Plan, released in 2010 by a consortium of major health-related organizations, calls for schools to do the same, and to stand accountable for the quality and quantity of the physical activity programs that they provide (www.physicalactivityplan.org).

In recent years, leading national public health, medical, and government organizations and agencies also have called on schools to adopt more strategies to help

children participate in high-quality physical education and other physical activity opportunities before, during, and after school, and to serve as the cornerstone in collaborative partnerships with communities to promote physical activity (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2011; Glickman et al., 2012; NASPE, 2009; National Association of State Boards of Education, 2009; National Education Association, 2010; National School Boards Association, 2012; Pate et al., 2006; Strong et al., 2005; USDHHS, 1996; U.S. White House Task Force on Obesity, 2010). The Institute of Medicine's 2012 report on obesity prevention calls for schools to become the national focal point for obesity prevention, and for all local education agencies and schools to adopt requirements for high-quality physical education—which includes a focus on skill development—and opportunities for daily physical activity outside of physical education (Glickman et al., 2012). All of those recommendations call for schools to assume strong leadership roles in the education and promotion of physical activity among children, both during the school day and outside of school.

What Is a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program?

A comprehensive school physical activity program is a systemic approach by which schools use all opportunities for school-based physical activity to develop physically educated students who participate in the nationally recommended 60-plus minutes of physical activity each day and who develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence to be physically active for a lifetime.

The five components of a CSPAP are

1. High-quality physical education

2. Physical activity during school
3. Physical activity before and after school
4. Staff involvement
5. Family and community engagement

The goals of a CSPAP are to:

- Provide a variety of physical activity opportunities throughout the school day, with a high-quality physical education program as the foundation;

- Provide physical activity opportunities both before and after school, so that all students can participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily;
- Incorporate physical activity opportunities for faculty and staff members, as well as for families;
- Encourage and reinforce physical activity opportunities in the community;
- Coordinate among the CSPAP components to maximize understanding, application, and practice of the knowledge and skills learned in physical education, so that all students are physically educated and motivated to pursue a lifetime of physical activity.

Exploring the Five Components of a CSPAP

Physical Education. A high-quality physical education program is the cornerstone of a comprehensive school effort to increase the physical activity levels of students (Rink, Hall, & Williams, 2010). Physical education teachers are responsible for providing students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to lead physically active lifestyles.

High-quality physical education is characterized by standards-based instruction and includes moderate-to-vigorous physical activity for at least 50 percent of the class time, but not at the expense of skill development or high-quality instruction; follows appropriate instruction practices; and is developmentally appropriate to

the physical, cognitive, and social needs of children (NASPE, 2003). Teachers and administrators must not neglect skill-development opportunities, as they provide a major avenue for promoting physical activity over a lifetime.

The success of a high-quality physical education program depends upon district and school administrative support in hiring highly qualified physical education teachers (NASPE, 2007), holding teachers accountable for high-quality instruction, and allocating funds for adequate equipment, facilities, and personnel.

Increasing physical education time in schools is an ideal way to increase physical activity, but it might require funded state-level legislation. Establishing physical activity programs in schools, however, requires little funding, and the CSPAP effort to build community and parent support has the potential to garner impetus for legislation to increase physical education time (Rink et al., 2010).

Physical Activity During the School Day. Along with high-quality physical education classes, students need additional opportunities for physical activity throughout the school day to help meet the recommended 60 minutes or more of daily physical activity. Physical activity breaks

interspersed throughout the day (see Table 1) can also contribute to improved cognitive skills and enhanced concentration, as well as improved classroom behavior (USDHHS, 2010a). Such activity breaks are not intended to take the place of high-quality physical education, but rather to supplement physical activity time accumulated during physical education class, and to help students use the skills and knowledge that they have acquired in physical education to participate in and enjoy physical activity.

Physical Activity Before and After School. Before- and after-school physical activity opportunities are promising venues for increasing students' overall physical activity levels (Beets, Beighle, Erwin, & White, 2009; Kaplan et al., 2005; NASPE, 2002a, 2002b; Powers, Conway, McKenzie, Sallis, & Marshall, 2002; Yin et al., 2005). A number of options—including intramural activities, interscholastic sports, active transport to school, activity clubs, youth sports, and traditional daycare/after-school programs—exist to promote physical activity for students during the hours before and after school (Beighle & Moore, 2012).

It is important that school personnel focus on providing

opportunities for the greatest number of students; thus, providing a wide variety of activities that stimulate student interest should be the goal. Each opportunity is described in more detail below, and a non-exhaustive list of options for elementary schools and secondary schools is presented in Table 2.

- *Intramural activities* encompass a myriad of physical activity choices, including sports (e.g., volleyball, tennis), individual lifetime activities (e.g., walking, jogging), and classes or lessons (e.g., karate, dance). They can be offered before or after school in a competitive or non-competitive environment. Also, intramural options can involve traditional sports or innovative activities to pique the interest of those who are not normally physically active.

- *Physical activity clubs* are similar to intramurals, but typically they start off smaller in an effort to gauge and/or increase student interest. They also are mostly recreational, with a non-competitive atmosphere. Examples can include orienteering, yoga, or other forms of specialized activities initiated by a staff member or parent who has a particular interest and/or skill set.

- *Interscholastic sports* typically are offered at the secondary

Table 1.
Examples of Physical Activity During the Day

Elementary School	Secondary School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start the day with a school-wide morning activity via classroom media. • Provide opportunities for daily walks. • Participate in low-organized teacher-led games or rhythmic experiences. • Engage in brief (3–5 minutes) active transitional activities between classroom tasks. • Integrate movement into academic content. • Provide daily recess for at least 20 minutes. • Host school-wide special events (e.g., walking programs, physical activity-oriented fundraisers, field days). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start the day with a school-wide morning activity via classroom media. • Extend lunch time to allow for "drop in" physical activity sessions organized in the gymnasium and/or outdoors. • Form physical activity clubs that meet during scheduled "club meeting days." • Provide the option to walk during lunch and study hall time. • Integrate physical activity into academics. • Host school-wide special events (e.g., walking programs, physical activity-oriented fundraisers, wellness fairs, field days). • Provide opportunities for intramural sport activities during lunchtime.

Table 2.
Examples of Elementary and Secondary Physical Activity Opportunities Before and After School

Elementary School	Secondary School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk and/or bike to school • Intramural sports (upper elementary) • Physical activity clubs • Youth sports • Traditional daycare/after-school programs • Informal recreation or play on school grounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk and/or bike to school • Intramural sports • Interscholastic sports • Physical activity clubs

school level. They are an important part of American culture; yet, with regard to improving physical activity for all students, they are highly exclusionary and tend to favor only skilled students. Research suggests that students' gender and age, and the type of sport (e.g., soccer, softball), influence the amount of physical activity accrued through interscholastic sports (Leek et al., 2011).

• *Youth sports* are community-based programs in which youth play organized sports in both competitive and noncompetitive environments, depending on the nature of the program. Generally, youth sports are offered by organizations within the community, such as a local YMCA, parks and recreation departments, and Boys' and Girls' Clubs, although they sometimes are school-based. Typically, youth sports are open to all children, regardless of skill level.

• *Before- and after-school programs* typically take place immediately before or after school and are run by various community organizations, as referenced above. They provide adult-supervised, organized activities in which students can participate beyond the traditional school day. There are no clear-cut mandates for offering physical activity during these programs; however, both structured and non-structured forms of physical activity are suggested.

Recommendations related to the amount of physical activity

offered during these hours (e.g., number of minutes of physical activity offered, percentage of time during the program dedicated to providing physical activity) are being implemented in a number of states (Beets, Wallner, & Beighle, 2010). The most recent suggestion is for after-school programs to help children accumulate up to 30 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per day (Beets, Huberty, & Beighle, 2012).

• *Active transport to and from school*—including National Walk to School Week, bike-to-school days, walking school buses, and other programs—is an effective way to add physical activity before and after school, as students who walk or bike to school tend to expend more energy on a daily basis (Cooper, Page, Foster, & Qahwaji, 2003; Tudor-Locke, Ainsworth, Adair, & Popkin, 2003; Tudor-Locke, Neff, Ainsworth, Addy, & Popkin, 2002).

• *Staff Involvement.* Staff involvement in a comprehensive school physical activity program includes both programs incorporated by school staff to increase the physical activity levels of students and programs incorporated to increase the physical activity levels of school staff members. School employee wellness programs, which have existed for years, are designed to improve the health of staff and can address a number of health aspects, including physical activity, nutrition, stress, and mental health. A CSFAP can

offer walking programs, personal training sessions, group fitness classes, yoga/Pilates, and other types of physical activities. Ideally, school staff members can use school facilities to participate in group physical-activity opportunities.

Staff involvement also can include having staff members provide opportunities for staff and students to be active. For example, staff might assist supervisors or sponsors of activity-based events and programs (e.g., intramurals, physical activity clubs). They also might show support by serving as physically active role models for students, as listed in Table 3.

• *Family and Community Engagement.* This fifth and final component of a comprehensive school physical activity program—family and community engagement—can exert the most significant impact on lifetime physical activity, since the physical activity opportunities for all students after their K–12 education occur within the community. As students progress through a P–12 school curriculum, they have several different physical activity opportunities (e.g., physical education, physical activity during the school day, physical activity before and after school). The link that is often missing for many students, however, is the connection with the local community.

A truly successful comprehensive school physical activity

program works with students, faculty, staff, parents, and others to engage in physical activity offerings in settings both within the school and in the community (NASPE, 2008) and thereby fosters the development of a lifetime of physical activity. Therefore, schools should take an active part in informing students of ways in which they can involve themselves in physical activity within their communities (e.g., walking trails, recreation leagues, fitness-based classes).

In addition, school administrators and each school's CSPAP champions—those who most significantly promote and affect physical activity levels within the school—should provide opportunities for physical activity within the school environment, or provide regularly scheduled school and community physical activity events (e.g., health fairs, annual road races, recreation nights). School administrators must play a strong role within any CSPAP, contributing to the overall vision and plan.

Perhaps the most meaningful way to encourage students to participate in physical activity is to provide strategies for them to be physically active with their own family members. Research suggests that children of physically active parents are more likely to be active than children of sedentary parents (Freedson & Evenson, 1991; Moore et al., 1991; Nader et al., 1996; Ornelas, Perreira, & Ayala, 2007; Welk, Wood, & Morss, 2003). Also, children

who are active with their parents are likely to be more active than children who are not active with their parents (Sallis, 1998a, 1998b). The same also might be true when students see significant others in their lives (e.g., close friends, teachers, leaders in the community) model physically active behaviors, as research demonstrates the effectiveness of modeling as an important factor in altering human behaviors (Bandura, 1997).

As students move through their P-12 education and turn into young adults, how, when, and where they engage in physical activity likely will change. To aid this transition, it is imperative that students are equipped with the knowledge and understanding of how to navigate physical activity options within their community. Ideally, by the time students graduate from high school, they are familiar with community options that interest them and have begun to develop lifestyle habits that will keep them physically active in places near their homes and/or work.

While one can recognize that being physically active with family members and/or within the community is important, other facets of family and community involvement must be considered. Schools have a tremendous opportunity to develop partnerships with local entities, creating a connection between school- and community-based physical activity options. This can include “promoting programs and facilities where people work, learn, live, play, and

worship (i.e., workplace, public, private and non-profit recreation sites) to provide easy access to safe and affordable physical activity opportunities; developing partnerships with other sectors for the purpose of linking youth with physical activity opportunities in schools and communities; and providing access to and opportunities for physical activity before and after school” (National Physical Activity Plan, www.physicalactivityplan.org). Examples might include sharing facilities, summer camp opportunities, and specific community-outreach endeavors or other special initiatives.

In addition to students' being physically active with family members, in the local community, and through different partnership occasions, another option for family and community involvement is for schools to organize and implement physical activity with family and community members on the school grounds. This might include family game nights (evening or weekend special events), nutrition and physical activity seminars, inviting guest speakers to participate in school functions, and physical activity fundraisers that include community member participation.

Further, school personnel can encourage physical activity at home and among community members by creating newsletters and other printed materials, or by providing information through a variety of technology-based outlets (e.g., email, web site, Facebook), so that parents

Table 3.
Examples of Elementary and Secondary School Staff Involvement

Elementary School	Secondary School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-employee wellness program • Role modeling • Sponsoring physical activity clubs, intramural sports, and other physical activity opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-employee wellness program • Role modeling • Sponsoring physical activity clubs, intramural sports, and other physical activity opportunities

are continually aware of the importance of physical activity and of strategies to promote safe physical activity for their children (NASPE, 2008).

Strategies for Implementing a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program

Some schools and/or districts have many programs that focus on the promotion of physical activity, and they are well on their way toward establishing a comprehensive school physical activity program. Establishing a comprehensive school physical activity program provides significant benefits for schools and communities, and often requires repurposing people and time within the school, without taking away from high-quality physical education. In addition, while many strategies to increase physical activity in all schools require no funding, additional funds are available from a variety of sources. (For more information, see www.LetsMoveSchools.org.) Successful schools have identified four questions to help determine a starting point for establishing a comprehensive school physical activity program:

1. Is the district supportive of increasing high-quality physical education and physical activity?
2. Is the mission shared with colleagues, the superintendent, governing board, and community members?
3. Is the recommended amount of time for high-quality physical education and physical activity supported by the administration?
4. Is a wellness leadership team in place?

While no "one size fits all" strategy exists, successful schools have identified the following list of key factors that contributed to their success:

- **Take ownership.** Develop a sense of belonging, because what we do is valuable. Get organized to ensure positive results.

- **Conduct a needs assessment.** Develop goals for students, faculty/staff, and the community.

- **Use a calendar.** Give notice of events early, highlighting certain events/weeks.

- **Make use of available programs and resources.** Consider all options, including indoor/outdoor space, pre-existing programs, and community resources.

- **Show enthusiasm.** Be energetic and flexible, and avoid simple frustrations stemming from lack of progress.

- **Provide professional development.** Make plans for growth and improvement, share ideas, and communicate with others.

- **Evaluate the program annually.** Identify areas in which the school is doing well. Target areas in which the school needs improvement.

Resources

For more information, see the following AAHPERD resources:

- Overview of a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program, www.letsmoveschools.org
- *101 Tips for Implementing a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program* (2010), www.aaahperd.org
- *Quality Coaches, Quality Sports: National Standards for Sport Coaches*, 2nd edition, www.aaahperd.org

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