



Section

3

Physical Activity

An increased focus on the importance of passing standardized tests, coupled with the budget cuts some schools are facing, has resulted in a dangerous situation for our nation's students: physical education is being eliminated from more and more schools. In our homes, we continue to embrace new forms of technology that make our lives easier. Unfortunately, the result is often increasingly sedentary lifestyles.

In this section we provide information about the importance of increasing children's opportunities to be physically active. We offer ideas of ways PTAs can take action on this issue, as well as examples of how some PTAs have already made progress. We also include handouts for parents to help them find ways to get involved, both at home and at school.

Fact Sheet: The Need for Physical Education and Physical Activity in Our Schools



Adapted from Action for Healthy Kids' Fact Sheet, Building the Argument: The Need for Physical Education and Physical Activity in Our Schools, www.actionforhealthykids.org

Studies show that when children's exercise and fitness needs are met, they are more able to learn and achieve. Given the growing epidemic of obesity and the link between physical activity and academic performance, parents and schools must work together to make quality daily physical education a priority in our schools and to give our children more opportunities to be physically active throughout the school day.

Our children are becoming overweight and are developing "adult" diseases:

- Poor diet and inadequate physical activity are among the top 10 leading causes of death in the United States and together account for at least 300,000 deaths annually. Obesity and overweight have "reached epidemic proportions in the United States."¹
- The epidemic has hit our children particularly hard: "today there are nearly twice as many overweight children and almost three times as many overweight adolescents as there were in 1980".¹ In 2000, 15 percent of children ages 6 to 11 were overweight and nearly 16 percent of adolescents were overweight.²
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns that one in three U.S. children born in 2000

will become diabetic unless many more people start eating less and exercising more.³

Our children are becoming increasingly less physically active:

- Less than 25 percent of children get at least 30 minutes of physical activity per day.⁴
- Children tend to become less physically active as they get older. By the time they reach their teens, nearly half of America's children are not vigorously active on a regular basis.⁵

Many of our children are sedentary at school:

- Most children (85 percent) travel to school by car or bus—only 13 percent walk or bike to school.⁶
- Since 1989, many school systems have abolished recess. Only 4 percent of states require recess and

22 percent of states recommend that elementary schools provide students with regular recess.⁷

- Between 1991 and 1999, the percentage of students who took physical education on a daily basis dropped from 42 percent to 29 percent.⁸

When children are active, their academic performance improves:

- Studies show that providing more time for physical activity (by reducing class time) can lead to increased test scores, particularly in the area of mathematics.^{9,10}

Physical activity programs have been linked to stronger academic achievement, increased concentration, and improved reading and writing test scores as well.¹¹

- Children who have daily physical education classes exhibit better attendance and have a more positive attitude about school.¹²
- Children who spend less time in other subjects in order to allow for regular physical education have been shown to *do equally well or better* in academic classes.¹³

1 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*. 2001.

2 J Am Med Assoc 2002;288:1723-1727.

3 Associated Press. *Diabetes in children set to soar*. MSNBC. June 16, 2003.

4 International Life Sciences Institute. *Improving Children's Health Through Physical Activity: A New Opportunity, A Survey of Parents and Children About Physical Activity Patterns*. 1997.

5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Guidelines for School and Community Programs: Promoting Lifelong Physical Activity*. 1997.

6 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Fact Sheet. *Kids Walk to School Program*. 2002.

7 Action for Healthy Kids. National Profile. 2002.

8 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Physical Activity and Good Nutrition: Essential Elements to Prevent Chronic Diseases and Obesity. *At a Glance*. 2003.

9 Shephard, R.J., Volle, M., Lavalee, M., LaBarre, R., Jequier, J.C., Rajic, M. Required physical activity and academic grades: a controlled longitudinal study. *Children and Sport*. Limarinen and Valimaki, editors. Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1984. 58-63.

10 Shephard, R.J. Curricular physical activity and academic performance. *Pediatric Exercise Science* 1997; 9: 113-126.

11 Symons, C.W., Cinelli, B., James, T.C., Groff, P. Bridging student health risks and academic achievement through comprehensive school health programs. *Journal of School Health* 1997; 67(6): 220-227.

12 National Association for Sport and Physical Education/Council of Physical Education for Children. *Physical education is critical to a complete education*. 2001.

13 President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. *Physical activity promotion and school physical education. Physical Activity and Fitness Research Digest*. 1999.

Improving Opportunities for Physical Activity at School: 10 Things PTAs Can Do



- 1. Provide pedometers** for a “steps” contest—give an award to the parent, teacher, student and staff member who takes the most steps in a given month.
- 2. Bring teachers, parents and students together** in an after-school walking, biking, running or skating club.
- 3. Encourage parents to volunteer** to walk groups of students to school on a rotating basis.
- 4. Give parents information** about community physical activity resources (such as programs at the local YMCA).
- 5. Raise funds** for school athletic equipment (see the ideas for healthy fundraisers in this notebook).
- 6. Plan group activities** for your PTA that involve fitness (e.g., a walking meeting with the principal).
- 7. Find creative ways** to make PTA fundraising activities active: sell services like raking leaves and shoveling snow.
- 8. Take a look** at your school’s playgrounds and athletic facilities. Test the equipment. Does your school do a good job of providing students with an environment that promotes physical activity?
- 9. Partner with local organizations** to provide after-school activities in your school’s athletic facilities.
- 10. Be advocates for recess and physical education.** Parents’ concerns and ideas are valuable—talk to your principal and other school leaders about the importance of incorporating at least 30 minutes of physical education run by accredited professional instructors, into every school day.

What Constitutes a Quality Physical Education Program?



Adapted from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, Fact Sheet: What Constitutes a Quality Physical Education Program?

Quality physical education programs are important because they provide learning experiences that meet the developmental needs of youngsters, improving a child's mental alertness, academic performance, readiness to learn and enthusiasm for learning. According to the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, a high-quality physical education program includes the following components: opportunity to learn, meaningful content and appropriate instruction.

Opportunity to Learn

- Instructional periods totaling 150 minutes per week (elementary) or 225 minutes per week (middle and secondary school)
- Qualified physical education specialist providing a developmentally appropriate program
- The teacher: pupil ratio in physical education is no greater than 1:25 for optimal instruction
- Adequate equipment and facilities

Meaningful Content

- Instruction in a variety of motor skills that are designed to enhance the physical, mental, and social/emotional development of every child
- Fitness education and assessment to help children understand, improve and/or maintain their physical well-being

- Development of cognitive concepts about motor skill and fitness
- Opportunities to improve their emerging social and cooperative skills and gain a multi-cultural perspective
- Promotion of regular amounts of appropriate physical activity now and throughout life

Appropriate Instruction

- Full inclusion of all students
- Maximum practice opportunities for class activities
- Well-designed lessons that facilitate student learning
- Out-of-school assignments that support learning and practice
- No physical activity for punishment
- Regular assessment to monitor and reinforce student learning

Local PTA Action Stories: Physical Activity



**Family Fun Walk/Run
Fundraiser;
Piney Orchard Elementary;
Odenton, Maryland**

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Starting in 2003, Piney Orchard Elementary School PTA has celebrated great success each spring with its major fundraiser for the year—a Family Fun Walk/Run Fundraiser. The executive board came up with the idea for the fundraiser when it decided to think “outside” the box: the board was tired of selling items that parents didn’t really want in the first place.

Before the event, students are sent home with pledge forms in order to solicit flat pledges and donations from family and friends. The event is held after school just after dismissal time, and family members and friends are encouraged to participate. Participants are separated into two groups: walkers and runners. The walkers use a sidewalk track around the perimeter of the school (perfect for parents with strollers and younger siblings), and the runners

are divided by age group and spaced out around the school’s running track.

Volunteers are also placed at different spots on the track to mark laps for participants on index cards. Participants walk or run for 30 minutes and then gather for refreshments as the results are tabulated. Awards are given to the top three fundraising families, the class with the most participants, and the male and female participants within three age-group categories that ran the most laps. Prizes consist of gift certificates, medals and trophies.

The Saturday following the Fun Run, Piney Orchard PTA holds a 5K race for the entire community. PTA members volunteer throughout the community to hand out water, block roads and encourage the runners. The local police donate their time to watch traffic for the runners and cheer them on.

Piney Orchard PTA raised \$4,000 in the first year of their Family Fun Walk/Run Fundraiser and more than doubled that amount to \$9,000 in the second year. They have found it to be a success that engages the entire school community in activities that promote health and fitness, and they plan to make it an annual event.

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**“Hearty Walkers”;
Rose Hill Elementary School;
Fairfax County, Virginia**

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The Rose Hill Elementary School Wellness Committee, with the support of the PTA, launched the “Hearty Walkers” program in January 2005. Although the weather was cold and dreary, many students and staff were motivated to engage in regular physical activity with their families. The program was promoted during physical education classes and in the weekly school newsletter. Additionally, each student received a handout for logging his or her physical activity for the month.

The emphasis of the program was family fitness activities. Participants walked with family members for a minimum of 30 minutes, three times a week. For inclement weather, alternative activities were also suggested, such as jumping rope, dancing, hula hooping, and using a treadmill or stationary bike with adult supervision.

In the first five months of the program, 102 students and 16 staff members had consistently been “Hearty Walkers.” Participants have been recognized for their achievements by having their names listed in the school newsletter, and by having their names written on paper cutouts shaped like tennis shoes posted in the lobby. Furthermore, monthly achievers have received various incentive items such as a

“Hearty Walker” certificate, a frisbee, and a small, inflatable beach ball (items donated by the Virginia Department of Health).

As the culminating event for the 2004–2005 school year, a reception was held for all participants, and the most consistently active participants were presented with jump ropes (purchased by the PTA). Additionally, participants were recognized at the end-of-the-year awards ceremony. Because of the favorable response and high participation, Rose Hill plans to launch next year’s program at the beginning of the school year.

**“Healthy Bodies,
Healthy Minds”;
Dr. Leroy E. Mayo School;
Holden, Massachusetts**

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The theme at Mayo School this year was “Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds.” They kicked off the school year in September with a “Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds” poster contest that was a huge success. The hallways were decorated with colorful posters, and prizes were awarded for each grade.

On Halloween morning, one of the school’s gym teachers led a snowshoe hike up Mt. Wachusett that was open to any Mayo Family. The November school assembly included an all-day demonstration from the Bayside Brewster Skippers. It was great motivation for the school and gym classes, and everyone was given a jump rope to bring home.

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The January PTA meeting included a yoga demonstration that was also held for students and teachers at their desks at the end of the month. During February vacation, another snowshoe hike was available up Mt. Monadnock. Healthy snacks were distributed during testing in March and, to broaden healthy minds, PTA Family Reading Night was held, where parents and teachers read to all grade levels. Finally, in June, the whole school participated in a walk to benefit diabetes research to round out the activities of the “Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds” theme for the year.

The Mayo PTA was able to take a lot of simple ideas and combine them to achieve great results. By scheduling events throughout the year, they continually reinforce their theme and ensure that there are a variety of activities in which everyone can participate.

Mileage Club; Ford Elementary School; Acworth, Georgia

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When Ford Elementary School’s physical education teacher saw students arriving early to school and sitting in the halls, she thought, “Why not have these students do something to benefit them physically?” She brought her question to the school’s PTSA, which agreed to sponsor a Mileage Club. The club was given an initial budget of \$100 to purchase rewards for students who walked five miles or more, whether in one week’s time, over several weeks, or once a month. As the program progressed, the budget increased to \$500.

The club meets every morning from 7:00 AM to 7:15 AM in the school gym under adult supervision. All 900 students in this K–5 school participate in the Mileage Club since they also walk on Fridays in gym class. Miles are determined by the number of laps achieved, with the lap numbers changing to accommodate the different venues where students walk. A bucket of small wooden sticks is placed at the end of one lap. Students are instructed to pick up one of the sticks after completing a lap. They then use those sticks to track their laps and miles, recording them daily on a sheet of paper. Student volunteers from the 5th grade are assigned to each grade level to record the laps and tally the miles for each student for the week, and a parent volunteer then keeps a record of all of the data on a spreadsheet.

The PTSA rewards students for every five miles completed with a small charm they can attach to the laces of their shoes. Rewards are also given to those students achieving 25 miles, 50 miles, and so on. Students who walk 100 miles or more receive a T-shirt. In addition, each month, the classroom that accumulates the most miles receives the Golden Shoe Trophy. Last year, the school racked up more than 30,000 walking miles, with 22 students walking 100 miles or more.

Parents really like the program; they say that they no longer have to drag their kids out of bed in the morning because the kids are eager to get to school so that they can walk with their friends. Some students have also begun to hike with their parents on the weekends or enter local road races. There has also been an increase in the number of students performing better in the annual President’s Physical Fitness Challenge.



Handouts

Physical Activity

Please make copies of these handouts and share them with parents.





Improving Opportunities for Physical Activity at School: 10 Things Parents Can Do

- 1. Work with your PTA** to raise funds for school athletic equipment.
- 2. Speak up about the importance of recess and physical education.** Parents' concerns and ideas are valuable—talk to your principal and other school leaders about the importance of incorporating at least 30 minutes of physical education run by accredited professional instructors, into every school day.
- 3. Encourage your child to participate in team sports or athletic programs.** Team sports/athletic programs may be sponsored by the school, community centers, the local YMCA, or parks and recreational organizations. Activities such as dance, baseball, horseback riding, gymnastics, swimming, basketball, soccer, biking, and running can dramatically increase your child's daily physical activity.
- 4. Talk to your child's teachers** about planning fitness breaks: 5-minute aerobic activities (like jumping jacks) to break up the school day.
- 5. Volunteer to help with physical activity events or sports at your child's school.** Become a part of your child's after-school physical activities, including sports teams, drama productions, marching bands, etc., by volunteering. Your child and the school will appreciate the extra hands.

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6. **Form a “walking school bus”** and volunteer to walk groups of students to school on a rotating basis.
7. **Ask school leaders** about including information about the importance of physical activity in the curriculum as well as in communications with parents, such as the school newsletter.
8. **Team up with other parents** to form an early morning or after-school walking, biking, or running club.
9. **Participate in Walk to School Day** with your children:
www.walktoschool.org.
10. **Connect** with ongoing efforts in your school and community. The local chapter of the American Heart Association or your local YMCA, for example, may have valuable ideas and materials that you can use.



15 Ideas for Family Fitness

Kids these days are spending too much time sitting still, and it's becoming a major health risk. American children 8 years old and above spend an average of 6.5 hours a day engaging with media technologies including watching TV, using the computer and playing video games.¹ Studies have shown that the more TV kids watch, the more likely they are to be overweight.²

Increasing physical activity improves cardiovascular fitness, helps prevent obesity, promotes a healthy lifestyle, boosts self-esteem and confidence, and reduces stress. You don't need to have a lot of fancy equipment or a membership at a health club—there are many ways to make your family's lifestyle more active.

To overcome resistance from reluctant youngsters, it helps to make the

activity fun. For example, don't just run with a young child—run like a penguin or hop like a kangaroo! Or have a destination like the park or zoo!

Here are 15 ideas for getting your family on the move:

- Take active vacations (hiking, swimming, skiing).
- At the mall or when running errands, use the stairs rather than the elevator.

- Get pedometers and have a contest to see who takes the most steps in a given week.
- Start a new tradition: take the whole family out for an after-dinner walk around the neighborhood or park.
- Take on active chores as a family (gardening, raking leaves, shoveling snow, or washing the car).
- Spend an afternoon at the local playground.
- Play a sport together (basketball, soccer, baseball, softball, touch football).
- Dance to your favorite music.
- Go for a family bike ride.
- Plant a family garden.
- Play miniature golf.
- Go to the zoo.
- Take the dog for a long walk.
- Whenever possible, walk short distances rather than using your car. When you drive, park a little farther away from the store.
- Play games that your kids love (tag, Simon Says, Red Light-Green Light, Duck-Duck Goose)

1 Kaiser Family Foundation. 2005. *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8–18 Year Olds*. Menlo Park, CA.

2 Center for Health Improvement. 2005. *Preschoolers Increasingly Overweight: Preventing Childhood Obesity: A Prop 10 Opportunity*. Updated Policy Brief.