

Facts on Student Wellness

Did You Know...?

- Childhood obesity has more than doubled in children and tripled in adolescents in the past 30 years.¹
- Regular physical activity in childhood and adolescence improves strength and endurance, helps build healthy bones and muscles, helps control weight, reduces anxiety and stress, increases self-esteem, and may improve blood pressure and cholesterol levels.²
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that young people aged 6–17 years participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily.
- Almost one in four children do not participate in any free-time physical activity.³
- Only 58.9% of districts required elementary schools to provide regularly scheduled recess for students and less than one in eight districts required schools at each grade level to provide physical activity breaks.⁴
- Only 2.0% of districts required and 11.7% recommended that high schools provide physical activity breaks, outside of physical education class.⁵
- Physical activity breaks integrated into classroom lessons, enhance on-task classroom behavior of students.⁶
- Physical activity is also critical to children's cognitive development and academic success. School-based physical activity does not negatively impact, and in many cases can help improve, academic performance, including attention, concentration, time-on-task, attendance, grades, and standardized test scores.⁷
- Schools can promote physical activity through comprehensive school physical activity programs, including recess, classroom-based physical activity, intramural physical activity clubs, interscholastic sports, and physical education.

Why is physical activity and nutrition education important?

- Children in the United States today are less fit than they were a generation ago
- Many children are showing early signs of cardiovascular risk factors such as physical inactivity, excess weight, higher blood cholesterol and cigarette smoking
- Inactive children, when compared with active children, weigh more, have higher blood pressure and lower levels of heart-protective high-density lipoproteins (HDL cholesterol) Healthy eating contributes to overall healthy growth and development, including healthy bones, skin, and energy levels; and a lowered risk of dental caries, eating disorders, constipation, malnutrition, and iron deficiency anemia
- Overweight and obese children often suffer from low self-esteem, bullying, teasing and depression
- There may be a link between the rise in childhood obesity and the rise in childhood asthma. Extra weight can make it harder to breathe and can inflame the respiratory tract. Children with serious asthma are more likely to be overweight.

¹ National Center for Health Statistics. Health, United States, 2011: With Special Features on Socioeconomic Status and Health. Hyattsville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2012.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008.

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Results from the School Health Policies and Practices Study United States, Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2012.

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Results from the School Health Policies and Practices Study United States, Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2012.

⁶ Mahar MT, Murphy SK, Rowe DA, Golden J, Shields A, Raedeke TD. Effects of a classroom-based program on physical activity and on-task behavior. *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise* 2006;38(12):2086-94.

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Association Between School Based Physical Activity, including Physical Education, and Academic Performance. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2010.

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- Physical activity produces overall physical, psychological and social benefits
- Inactive children are likely to become inactive adults

What can schools do help?

- Ensure that all elementary students participate in at least 20 minutes of recess per day
- Schedule recess before lunch
- Elementary schools should dedicate at least 20% of before/afterschool program time to physical activity
- Implement policies and practices to reinforce that physical activity is not used for or withheld as punishment
- Create opportunities for students to participate in daily physical activity during the school day
- Offer a healthy snack as part of the After School Snack and/or Meals Program(s) reimbursed through the USDA or an independent meal program that meets the Alliance's Guidelines
- Incorporate nutrition education into afterschool academic enrichment and/or tutoring programs that serve reimbursable snacks/meals
- Provide annual professional development trainings for elementary afterschool providers on the importance of and strategies for including physical activity and healthy eating as an element of their programs
- Provide a range of competitive and non-competitive physical opportunities before or after the school day
- Actively support and promote walking or bicycling to and from school
- Incorporate lifetime physical activities such as: walking, running, hiking, swimming, tennis, dancing and bicycling
- Encourage students and staff to connect with physical activity opportunities in the community and utilize community resources to provide physical activity and/or nutrition education opportunities before or after school
- Educate parents on ways to make healthier choices at home and provide them with resources about the importance of good nutrition and physical activity. Involve parents in activities designed to promote good dietary and exercise habits.

What is the Healthy Schools Program?

- The Healthy Schools Program is an initiative of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, founded by the American Heart Association and the William J. Clinton Foundation.
- The Healthy Schools Program focuses on helping schools:
 - improve the food and beverages during the regular and extended school day
 - increase physical activity
 - improve the quality of health education and physical education programs
 - establish wellness programs for school employees

Participation in the Healthy Schools Program is an excellent way to jump start the implementation of the district wellness policy at your school and to be recognized for your efforts. By joining the program, your school will gain access to best practice tools and resources through telephonic and online support. Examples of support include: online trainings with a cadre of experts, Implementers' Toolkits on a variety of topics, and tangible resources to help with implementation.

The Healthy Schools Program team can help your school every step of the way!

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