

January 2014



The Importance of Daily P.E. in Iowa Elementary Schools

Nearly one-third of the nation's youth are overweight or obese.¹ Physical inactivity is a contributing factor to overweight and obesity. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) recommends that elementary children receive 150 minutes or more of instructional physical education (P.E.) weekly.² This document focuses on the importance of daily physical education class in shaping the health of children.

- ◆ 28% of Iowa children are overweight or obese.³
- ◆ Nationally, only 4% of elementary schools provide daily physical education.⁴



The Obesity Epidemic

Children today face an obesity epidemic of great concern. The percent of children that are obese has doubled in the last thirty years; it has tripled for adolescents.¹ Not surprisingly, obesity has a negative impact on a child's health and well-being. In the short-term, obese children are more likely to have at least one risk factor for cardiovascular disease such as high cholesterol or high blood pressure. In the long-term, obese children are more likely to become obese adults, increasing their chance for developing chronic diseases.¹

Preventive Measures

The good news is that obesity can be prevented through a variety of strategies aimed at proper nutrition and increased physical activity. Parents, caregivers, health professionals, school leaders, and government agencies alike are charged with teaching children healthy behaviors and providing a supportive environment. One way to increase physical activity is through school-based physical education. With children spending more than 1,000 hours annually in school, the academic environment plays a critical role in obesity prevention.⁴

The Benefits of Physical Activity

Research is extensive on the connection between physical activity and academic performance.⁵ Brain structure and functioning has been linked to physical activity.⁶ Specifically, improved concentration, cognitive processing, and standardized test performance are evident in children who are more active.⁶ Research also links

better school attendance and behavior to children who are more physically fit.⁷

Physical Education: Quality and Quantity

Some may have concern that spending or



increasing time in physical education will cause students to perform poorly in other academic areas. Schools must meet

requirements for instructional time in core subjects and are under pressure to report high scores on standardized tests. This demand may cause educators to reduce or eliminate P.E. from the daily schedule. Studies have found this is not an effective strategy to improve test scores and may actually impede student performance.⁸

A quality P.E. program engages children in physical activity while teaching knowledge and skills for lifetime physical activity.⁹ The National Association for Sport and Physical Education recommends that schools provide 150 minutes weekly of instructional physical education at the elementary level.² Most Iowa schools do not meet this guideline. A 2011 online survey by the Iowans Fit for Life Educational Settings Workgroup found that only 4% of respondents (N = 108 P.E. teachers grades 3-5) indicated their school provided 150 minutes or more of P.E. weekly to students. Awareness of the benefits of daily P.E. could lead to increased daily physical education for Iowa students.

¹ <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/obesity/facts.htm>

² <http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/standards/nationalGuidelines/>

³ <http://www.childhealthdata.org>

⁴ www.HealthierGeneration.org

⁵ 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. www.cdc.gov

⁶ Institute of Medicine. *Educating the Student Body: Taking Physical Activity and Physical Education to School.* May 2013. www.iom.edu

⁷ <http://activelivingresearch.org/activeeducation>. *Physically Active and Fit Children Perform Better in School.* July 2012

⁸ www.GENYOUTHFoundation.org. *The Wellness Impact Report.* 2013

⁹ <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/pecat/highquality.htm>

Schools Score High With P.E.

SUCCESS STORIES FROM IOWA SCHOOLS WITH DAILY PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Spring Creek Elementary, Southeast Polk Community School District (Grade 6)

Why we do it:

Daily physical education (P.E.) is an effective way to meet the requirements of the Healthy Kids Act. Teachers report that students are more focused and better behaved in the classroom after spending time in P.E. By offering daily P.E., we were able to qualify for a grant from *Fuel Up to Play 60* that provided funding to buy exercise equipment. Another benefit of daily P.E. is the increased time spent on skill development. It's fun to see the students daily and get to know them well.



How we do it:

Every 6th grade class receives 30 minutes of daily P.E. from one of the two P.E. teachers. Instruction may take place outdoors when the weather allows. We offer a variety of activities each week. Monday is focused on team-building; Tuesday and Thursday are devoted to skill development; Wellness Wednesday is heavy on cardio-vascular training; and Friday is reserved for popular games. southeastpolk.org

Grundy Center Elementary, Grundy Center Community School District (Grades 2-5)

Why we do it:

Health is one of our values and physical activity is a predictor of good health. Research shows that a healthier, fit child is a better learner. We try to help kids become healthy, happy people. Our teachers are supportive of daily P.E. and appreciate the effect it has on the students. It is easier to gain and keep support for daily P.E. when it is a high-quality program that teaches physical, cognitive, and social skills.

How we do it:

We have one instructor who teaches eleven 25-30 minute classes each day. We provide a diverse program which includes warm-ups designed to promote the mind-body connection that stimulates learning. On Fridays, we make it fun with a team challenge that requires students to problem solve, communicate effectively and work together while being physically active. spartanpride.net



SCHOOL WELLNESS RESOURCES

The HealthierU.S. School Challenge (HUSSC)

Educateiowa.gov/pk-12/nutrition-programs/

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) awards schools a Bronze, Silver, Gold or Gold of Distinction award based on their abilities to improve the nutrition and physical activity environment.

Healthy Schools Program / Let's Move! Active Schools

healthiergeneration.org

The Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program promotes healthy school environments by improving access to nutritious foods and increasing opportunities for physical activity. The Let's Move! Active Schools initiative works alongside the Healthy Schools Program to empower school wellness champions to create active environments.

Fuel Up to Play 60

Fueluptoplay60.com

This program, founded by the National Dairy Council and the National Football League in collaboration with the USDA, empowers students to make their school healthier. Students and adults partner to achieve school wellness goals.

Live Healthy Iowa Kids

Livehealthyiowakids.org

A program of the Iowa Sports Foundation, Live Healthy Iowa Kids challenges youth to be more active and eat healthy through three different events: Fall Fitness Day, Go the Distance Day and 10 Week Wellness Challenge.



Presidential Youth Fitness Program

Fitness.gov

This school based program focuses on physical activity for children. Resources are available for physical educators and parents.

Physical Education Curriculum Analysis Tool (PECAT)

Cdc.gov/healthyyouth/PECAT/

This tool helps schools plan and evaluate their physical education curricula.



This publication was produced in collaboration with the Iowa Partners: Action For Healthy Kids and is made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Learn more about Iowa's Community Transformation Grant at <http://www.idph.state.ia.us/CTG>.