



## FACTS

### Physical Activity Promotion in Education

#### Overview

Schools have a long history of addressing the health of youth through physical activity, traditionally through recess, in physical education, and during afterschool programs. In recent years, U.S. schools have educated nearly 50 million children (pre-K – grade 12) per year. These children each spent an average of 1,300 hours per year in school.

Schools are continually faced with increasing demands to improve academic performance, resulting in reduced opportunities for activity and play during the school day. School citing, increases in traffic and safety concerns have resulted in less and less students walking or riding a bike to school losing valuable regular opportunities for physical activity. NCPPA believes that it is imperative that school personnel and physical activity advocates work collaboratively to take action to facilitate opportunities for schoolchildren and their families to increase their daily physical activity.

#### Where Has All the Play Gone?

The reasons for the decrease in daily physical activity around schools are many. It is important to understand some of the facts and figures in order to chart the course for moving forward and reversing the startling numbers.

- The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act required unprecedented accountability from schools. Elementary schools increased the amount of time devoted to reading by 47% in reading, as a percentage of total instructional time in the school day, and 37% in mathematics. One of the, likely unintended, effects of this increased emphasis were decreases in time for physical education (35%) and recess (28%).<sup>i</sup>
- Recess was on the decline even before the advent of NCLB. 40 percent of elementary schools have reduced, deleted, or are considering deleting recess since 1989, when 90 percent of schools had some form of recess.<sup>ii</sup>

- Although the National Physical Activity Guidelines state the call for youth to get 60 minutes of physical activity (moderate and vigorous) per day there is no federal law requires physical education to be provided to students in American schools.<sup>iii</sup>
- There are no incentives to states or schools to offer physical education programs.<sup>iii</sup>
- A nationally representative survey in 2002 found that 53 percent of parents drove their children to school, with another 38 percent putting their children on a school bus with only 17% saying they walked and 5% reported their children biked to school.<sup>iv</sup>

#### Physical Activity & Academic Success

Are children who are physically active more successful students than those who are not? Much anecdotal evidence suggests this to be the case and emerging evidence based research is beginning to make a strong case as well. There is a need for more research in this area to enable advocates to present a strong case for allocating education funding towards physical education and making physical activity a part of every student's day.

- A 2007-08 study of more than 2.4 million Texas students found that students who were physically fit were more likely to do well on the state's standardized tests than students who were not physically fit.<sup>iii, v</sup>
- A 2010 CDC report analyzes a large body of evidence linking physical education and school-based physical activity with academic performance, including cognitive skills and attitudes, academic behaviors and academic achievement.<sup>vi, iii</sup>
- A study conducted in 2006 with 214 sixth-grade students in Michigan found that students enrolled in PE had similar grades and standardized test scores as students who were not enrolled in PE, despite receiving 55 minutes less of daily classroom instruction time for academic subjects.<sup>14 vii</sup>

## Policy Changes to Increase Physical Activity-A National Physical Activity Plan

The United States first National Physical Activity Plan (Plan) was launched in 2010 with a vision: One day, all Americans will be physically active and they will live, work, and play in environments that facilitate regular physical activity.<sup>vii</sup> The Plan, a public-private sector effort, consists of a set of policies, programs, and initiatives directed to increasing physical activity in all segments of the American population. The Plan provides a roadmap to get America moving. It addresses the educational, behavioral, policy, medical and physical infrastructure issues that affect how and why so many Americans are not moving. It unites professionals across sectors – in education, recreation, sports, fitness, medicine and public health, transportation and urban planning, and business – in a massive effort to collaborate and solve the problem. Countless numbers of organizations are working together to change our communities in ways that will enable every American to be sufficiently physically active.

### Immediate Priorities for the Education Sector

- **Develop state and school district policies that (1) require comprehensive physical activity programs and (2) include mechanisms for monitoring implementation.**
  - Develop a model policy for Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs (CSPAP) that includes mechanisms for school accountability. Work with at least five national education and/or health associations in 2011 to secure endorsements for the model policy.
  - Develop a presentation that describes why and how to adopt comprehensive policies for CSPAP
  - Compile national, state, and local policies for use with CSPAP.
  - Identify and/or develop accountability tools.
  - Create a shared toolkit for partnering organizations to promote CSPAP.
- **Ensure that early childhood education settings for children ages 0 to 5 years promote and facilitate physical activity.**
  - Physical activity standards for childcare settings will be clearly defined for birth to 5-year-old children by Sept. 2015.
  - Work to insure that a minimum of six states adopt physical activity regulations in childcare settings by Sept. 2015.
  - Actively disseminate information of the 2011 release of early childhood physical activity standards through presentations at state, regional and national conferences as well as using web based technology such as a webinar.
- **Promote physical activity before school afterschool, and during the summer (collectively known as afterschool).**
  - Develop and disseminate national physical activity standards to 10,000 afterschool providers in 2011.

- Conduct a survey of afterschool care providers (minimum of 500). Develop and begin disseminating best practices regarding afterschool physical activity and nutrition.
- Create requirement and/or preference/priority for physical activity in afterschool federal funding streams.

*The National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity (NCPA) is the leading force in the country promoting physical activity and fitness initiatives. NCPA is a diverse blend of associations, health organizations, and private corporations, advocating for initiatives and policies that encourage Americans of all ages to become more physically active. NCPA is providing the leadership for implementation of the National Physical Activity Plan. For more information, visit <http://www.physicalactivityplan.org>*

- <sup>i</sup> Siedentop, D. (2009). National plan for physical activity: Education sector. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 6 (Supplement 2), S168-S180
- <sup>ii</sup> National Association of Early Childhood Development Specialists in State Departments of Education, "Recess and the Importance of Play," A Position Statement on Young Children and Recess, 2001 ([www.eric.ed.gov](http://www.eric.ed.gov) [September 26, 2005]).
- <sup>iii</sup> National Association for Sport and Physical Education & American Heart Association. (2010). 2010 Shape of the nation report: Status of physical education in the USA. Reston, VA: National Association for Sport and Physical Education.
- <sup>iv</sup> Beldon Russonello and Stewart Research and Communications, Americans' Attitudes toward Walking and Creating Better Walking Communities, Surface Transportation Policy Project Report (Washington: Beldon Russonello & Stewart Research and Communications, 2003) ([www.transact.org/report.asp?id=205/](http://www.transact.org/report.asp?id=205/)) [September 26, 2005].
- <sup>v</sup> Texas Education Agency. (2009). Physically fit students more likely to do well in school, less likely to be disciplinary problems. Austin, TX: Texas Education Agency.
- <sup>vi</sup> U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). The association between school-based physical activity, including physical education, and academic performance. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2010.
- <sup>vii</sup> Active Living Research, *Research Brief* (Summer, 2009). Active Education: Physical Education, Physical Activity, and Academic Performance
- <sup>viii</sup> U.S. National Physical Activity Plan (2010). National Physical Activity Plan. Retrieved January 5, 2011, from <http://physicalactivityplan.org/theplan.php>

#### For More Information Contact:

Sheila Franklin  
The National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity  
1100 H Street, NW # 510 • Washington DC • 20005  
202.454.7521  
[www.ncppa.org](http://www.ncppa.org) • [sfranklin@ncppa.org](mailto:sfranklin@ncppa.org)

