



# Maximizing Opportunities for Physical Activity during the School Day

Fact Sheet | November 2009

Studies have shown that short bouts of physical activity throughout the school day may enhance academic performance, on-task classroom behavior and student concentration.<sup>1</sup> However, despite these benefits, most school-age children are not getting the recommended 60 minutes or more of physical activity every day.<sup>2</sup> Since students spend a significant amount of time at school or in school-related activities, schools play a central role in providing opportunities for students to engage in regular physical activity. School boards can consider adopting, revising, monitoring and/or evaluating policy and curriculum that support increased physical activity opportunities throughout the school day.

## SCHOOL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY BREAKS

School districts/county offices of education (COE) can support built-in breaks during the school day that are available for physical activity, such as:

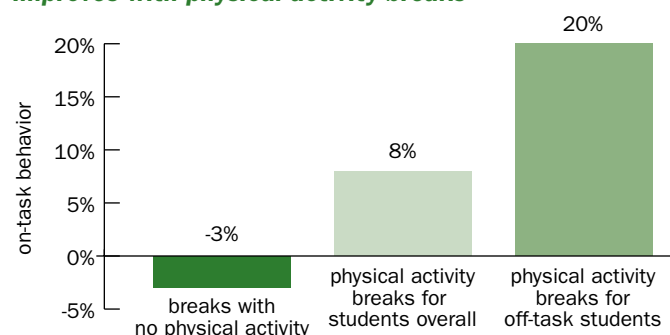
- **Recess.** Studies show that play helps children develop language, reasoning skills, autonomous thinking and problem solving skills. Play also helps their ability to focus and control their behavior.<sup>3</sup> In one study of approximately 11,000 students, teachers reported better classroom behavior for students who had daily recess.<sup>4</sup> To attain these benefits, recess should be provided for at least 20 minutes every day in elementary schools.<sup>5</sup>
- **Lunchtime.** Schools can provide sports, physical education (P.E.) and/or playground equipment for students to utilize within the lunch period. Some elementary districts provide recess before lunch so that students are able to be physically active after sitting in the classroom.

## CLASSROOM-BASED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Incorporating physical activity into the classroom does not have to compete with educational goals. In fact, integrating physical activity into the classroom may reactivate, engage and energize students to focus on the classroom material.<sup>6</sup> Ideas to support physical activity in the classroom include:

- **Integrating physical activity into the curriculum.** Teachers can guide learning with activities that get students moving while learning the content in a variety of subjects (e.g., science, math and reading).<sup>7</sup>
- **Structuring the classroom to facilitate physical activity.** Classroom teachers may enhance learning by incorporating physical activity equipment (e.g., stability balls) into the classroom during regular instruction.<sup>8</sup> To minimize costs of physical activity equipment, districts/COEs can explore contributions from local businesses.
- **Providing physical activity breaks.** Students may get restless or off-task after long periods of sedentary activity (e.g., periods of 20 minutes or more) in the classroom. By taking a short stretching or physical activity break, students may exhibit more on-task classroom behavior.<sup>9</sup>

### *Elementary students' on-task classroom behavior improves with physical activity breaks*



Source: Active Education: Physical Education, Physical Activity and Academic Performance<sup>9</sup>



## OTHER SCHOOL-BASED ACTIVITIES

School districts/COEs can support school-based activities that encourage physical activity, such as:

- **School clubs.** School clubs (e.g., running, yoga and dance clubs) can promote physical activity and bring students together around a common interest.
- **School competitions.** Events such as jump rope, walking (e.g., using a pedometer) or hula-hoop competitions among students or between students and teachers can be used to engage the entire school in physical activity.
- **Physically active fundraisers.** Walk-a-thons, jog-a-thons, dance-a-thons, sports tournaments, 5Ks and other physically active fundraisers promote physical activity for students and can be profitable for schools.

## BOARD ACTIONS TO INCREASE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN SCHOOLS

School boards have an opportunity to support physical activity through each of their major areas of responsibility: setting direction, establishing an effective and efficient structure, providing support to staff during implementation, ensuring accountability and acting as community leaders. For example, they can:

- 1) Develop an understanding among the board, district/COE staff and the community of the importance of physical activity and its link to student learning.
- 2) Adopt curriculum goals to integrate physical activity into the classroom. (For more information, visit [www.csba.org/PhysicalActivity.aspx](http://www.csba.org/PhysicalActivity.aspx).)
- 3) Adopt and align policies related to physical activity during the school day to accomplish district/COE goals and objectives (e.g., see CSBA's sample policy BP 5030 - Student Wellness). Through policy, boards can set expectations that:
  - Support recess as a necessary component of the school day for elementary schools.
  - Support training for recess supervisors to engage students in active play.<sup>10</sup>
  - Ensure the lunch period provides sufficient time for physical activity.
  - Discourage the use or withholding of physical activity as punishment.
  - Ensure the provision and maintenance of equipment, playground and athletic facilities that support physical activity.

- 4) Ensure that the district/COE explores funding opportunities and cost-effective strategies for improving physical activity opportunities during the school day, such as:
  - Applying for local, state or federal grants (e.g., the Carol M. White Physical Education Program grant) to ensure that schools have adequate playground and sports equipment and facilities.
  - Recruiting parent, student or community volunteers to help paint the recess grounds with designs that encourage children to engage in active games.<sup>11</sup>
  - Utilizing P.E. teachers to train classroom teachers or recess supervisors on methods to provide physical activity.
  - Partnering with local colleges or health departments to provide professional development opportunities, such as in-service days devoted to training teachers on how to incorporate physical activity into the classroom.
- 5) Monitor physical activity programs and schedule regular reports to the board, program partners and the public from the superintendent or designee. Recognize and reward outstanding or innovative physical activity programs.
- 6) Cultivate strong partnerships among the school and outside community to maximize resources and develop cost-effective physical activity opportunities for students.

For successful strategies from districts/COEs to incorporate physical activity into the school day, visit [www.csba.org/PhysicalActivity.aspx](http://www.csba.org/PhysicalActivity.aspx).

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

### California School Boards Association

[www.csba.org](http://www.csba.org)

### California Project LEAN (Leaders Encouraging Activity and Nutrition)

[www.CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org](http://www.CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org)

## REFERENCES

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