

# Physical Activity Opportunities at School

Participation in regular physical activity promotes normal growth and development by helping youth build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints.<sup>1</sup> Physical activity helps reduce the risk of developing obesity and chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and also promotes psychological well-being.<sup>1</sup> There are a variety of opportunities for physical activity during the school day and at the school setting. These include physical education classes, recess, before and after school programs, active classrooms, and Walk to School and Safe Routes to School programs.

## How are Minnesota youth doing?

National guidelines recommend children and adolescents participate in 60 minutes or more of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week.

Activities should be developmentally appropriate, enjoyable, and include variety.<sup>1,2,3</sup> In addition, extended periods (two hours or more) of physical inactivity are discouraged for children, especially during the daytime hours.<sup>3</sup>

Data from the Minnesota Student Survey indicate a high percentage of Minnesota youth, especially girls, fail to meet national physical activity recommendations.<sup>4</sup>

Percentage of students reporting being physically active 5 or more days per week for at least 30 minutes per day (moderate physical activity):

	<u>Grade 6</u>	<u>Grade 9</u>	<u>Grade 12</u>
Boys	52%	62%	52%
Girls	43%	49%	31%

Percentage of students participating in a physical activity that made them sweat or breathe hard 3 or more days per week for at least 20 minutes per day (vigorous physical activity):

	<u>Grade 6</u>	<u>Grade 9</u>	<u>Grade 12</u>
Boys	71%	75%	66%
Girls	69%	70%	51%

## Physical education classes

Physical education classes provide students with opportunities to be physically active and to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to establish and sustain an active lifestyle.<sup>5</sup> The national recommendation for the amount of time to be dedicated to physical education classes is 150 minutes per week in elementary schools and 225 minutes per week in middle and high schools.<sup>6</sup>

School-based physical education is strongly recommended because of its effectiveness in increasing physical activity and improving physical fitness among adolescents and children.<sup>7</sup> The recommended 60 minutes or more of physical activity for young people can be achieved, in part, through physical education classes.

## Recess

Recess provides opportunities for youth to accumulate minutes of physical activity during the school day. Recess can also provide the opportunity for children to enhance cooperation and negotiation skills and improve attentiveness and concentration in the classroom.<sup>6</sup> National organizations like the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have called for regular recess periods in elementary schools.<sup>5</sup>



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## Physical Activity Opportunities at School – page 2

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Guidelines for recess include not replacing physical education with unstructured recess, scheduling recess periods so that they do not precede or follow physical education classes, encouraging physical activity during recess, and ensuring the availability of safe facilities and equipment.<sup>5</sup>

### **Before and after school programs**

School activities that take place outside of school hours can also help contribute to total daily physical activity for youth. Before and after school programs to promote physical activity include competitive sports teams, clubs, classes or training, recreational and intramural sports, or nonathletic activities that involve physical activities (e.g. outdoor education, community service programs).<sup>5</sup>

In Minnesota, 95% of elementary schools collaborate with other sectors of the community to provide before and after school opportunities for physical activity for students.<sup>8</sup> When school is not in session, schools can allow the use of indoor and outdoor school facilities for programs sponsored by community organizations such as YMCAs, parks and recreation departments, and Boys and Girls Clubs.<sup>6</sup>

### **Active classrooms**

Active classrooms provide another opportunity for movement and help minimize extended periods of sedentary time students experience during the school day. For example, replacing classroom chairs with stability balls or standing desks can help students concentrate, improve behavior and burn off excess energy. Regular physical activity breaks can enhance the school environment, help establish social norms for active lifestyles, and improve student concentration skills and classroom behavior.<sup>5,9</sup>

Several strategies have been designed for promoting physical activity with youth at schools. One example is “BAM! Body and Mind,” a Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention campaign designed for youth ages 9-13 which provides classroom information on the importance of physical fitness.<sup>10</sup> Another example is SMART (Student Media Awareness to Reduce Television), a classroom curriculum for elementary students, which has proven successful in reducing weight gain.<sup>11</sup>

### **Walk to School and Safe Routes to School programs**

Nearly half of all schools support or promote walk and bike to school programs as a way to increase levels of daily physical activity for children.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, national data indicate that only 15% of children’s trips to and from school are made by walking or biking.<sup>12</sup> Parents report multiple barriers that inhibit walking and biking to school including long distances, traffic danger, weather, crime and school policy.<sup>13</sup>

Various programs have been designed to promote walking and biking to school among youth.<sup>12</sup> The KidsWalk-to-School Program, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention initiative, aims to increase opportunities for physical activity by encouraging children to walk and bike to school in groups accompanied by adults and by encouraging community coalitions to create and support safe routes to school.<sup>12</sup> The Minnesota Safe Routes to School Program funds projects that improve biking and walking conditions for elementary and middle school children in grades K-8.<sup>14</sup>

### **Summary**

Schools serve as excellent venues to provide students with the opportunity for daily physical activity, to promote healthy growth and development, to teach the importance of regular physical activity and health, and to build skills that support active lifestyles.<sup>9</sup>

## Physical Activity Opportunities at School – page 3

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### References

<sup>1</sup>CDC. (1996). Physical activity and health: A report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2005). Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005. Online resource: [www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines).

<sup>3</sup>National Association for Sport and Physical Education. (1995). *Moving into the future: National physical education standards: A guide to content and assessment*. Reston, VA: National Association for Sport and Physical Education.

<sup>4</sup>Minnesota Departments of Education, Health, Human Services and Public Safety. 2007 Minnesota Student Survey. Online resource: [www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/mss](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/mss)

<sup>5</sup>Pate, R., Davis, M., Robinson, T., Stone, E., McKenzie, T., & Young, J. (2006). AHA Scientific Statement, Promoting Physical Activity in Children and Youth: A Leadership Role for Schools. *Circulation*, 114(11): 1214-1224.

<sup>6</sup>Lee, S., Burgeson, C., Fulton, J., & Spain, C. (2007). Physical education and physical activity: Results from the School Health Policies and Programs Study 2006. *Journal of School Health*, 77: 435-463.

<sup>7</sup>National Association for Sport and Physical Education & American Heart Association. (2006). 2006 Shape of the nation report: Status of physical education in the USA. Reston, VA: National Association for Sport and Physical Education.

<sup>8</sup>Minnesota Department of Education & Minnesota Department of Health. (2004). Health and Physical Education in Minnesota Schools, 2002. Mounds View, MN: Minnesota Institute of Public Health.

<sup>9</sup>Trost, S. (2007). Active education: Physical education, physical activity, and academic performance. Active Living Research: research brief. November 8, 2007. Online resource: [www.rwjf.org/pr/product.jsp?id=23456&topicid=1301](http://www.rwjf.org/pr/product.jsp?id=23456&topicid=1301).

<sup>10</sup>BAM! Body and Mind. Online resource: [www.bam.gov/](http://www.bam.gov/)

<sup>11</sup>SMART (Student Media Awareness to Reduce Television). Online resource: <http://notv.stanford.edu>.

<sup>12</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. KidsWalk-to-School. Online resource: [www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/).

<sup>13</sup>Desapriya, E., Pike, I., Basic, A., & Subzwari, S. (2007). Deterrent to healthy lifestyles in our communities. *Pediatrics*, 119(5): 1040-1041.

<sup>14</sup>Minnesota Department of Transportation. Safe Routes to School Program. Online resource: [www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes](http://www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes).