



## **MAKING A DIFFERENCE**



## ***Providing an environment to support children's participation in physical activity***

Children spend such a significant proportion of their time in school during their formative years that by virtue of that very fact, schools play an important role in promoting physical activity for children. They cater to a large number of children, typically have in place facilities and equipment necessary to be active, and have opportunities for support children's physical activity.<sup>10</sup> The school provides a unique and credible role for 1) educating children about the benefits of physical activity, 2) teaching the importance of the importance of lifelong active living, 3) developing the skills necessary to participate in such active behaviours and 4) supporting and promoting participation in physically activity (via physical education classes, during recess, lunch hour, before and after school). It is important to provide opportunities for physical activity at school through structured activities (including physical education curriculum, intramurals, inter-scholastic activities, and so on) as well as integrated in other aspects of school life. Research has shown that improvement of the physical environment and supervision resulted in a higher percentage of girls and boys who were physically active, compared to schools who lacked such improvements.<sup>28</sup> One would conclude that interventions that develop the school environment to encourage physical activity, as well as improved social supports, may help increase the physical activity levels of children and youth.<sup>28</sup> Recommendations are provided below to help integrate physical activity into school life, build a more supportive environment for physical activity at school, and link the efforts of educators to increase physical activity of children and youth with those of health and recreation professionals.

### ***Providing comprehensive physical activity programming in schools***

Canada is one of several countries that have established national initiatives to increase physical education programming in schools.<sup>29</sup> Canadian efforts include the Quality Daily Physical Education (QDPE) program, which recommends a "planned and implemented" school program of daily physical education opportunities provided to all students throughout the school year.<sup>8</sup> QDPE is an important strategy of the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (CAHPERD) for increasing physical education in Canadian schools, providing awareness and skills that will encourage lifelong physical activity behaviour, as well as reducing the current inactivity rates among children and youth.<sup>8</sup> In addition to the reduction of physical inactivity, studies have shown that children who participate in physical activity programs show positive outcomes, including: improved self-esteem; increased concentration and academic achievement, and reduced disciplinary behaviours.<sup>30</sup> CAHPERD recommends that physical education programs at school should:

- Provide a minimum of 150 minutes of class instruction and activity periods a week per student
- Provide well-planned lessons including a wide range of activities

- Encourage participation of all students regardless of age and ability
- Emphasize enjoyment, success, fair play, self-fulfillment, and personal health
- Ensure activities and lessons are appropriate for the age and stage of development of the students
- Ensure activities and lessons enhance cardiovascular systems, muscular strength, endurance, and flexibility
- Provide opportunities for all students to participate in school intramural activities and leadership opportunities
- Provide qualified and enthusiastic teachers
- Provide a safe learning environment for physical activity
- Promote the enjoyment of physical education classes and intramural activities.<sup>8</sup>

Recommendations related to the importance of comprehensive physical activity programming, cited in the report entitled *Increasing physical activity: Supporting children's participation* (the report describing data from the 2001 Physical Activity Monitor) are generally supported by the data found in this report. Therefore, we continue to recommend that schools:

- ✓ Aspire to providing quality daily physical education to students from kindergarten to high school graduation.
- ✓ Ensure that physical education programs are taught by physical education specialists, or qualified teachers, with appropriate training in physical education.
- ✓ Promote physical activity programs and physical education classes that not only involve participation in physical activities, but teach lifelong skill-building and confidence-building behaviours to children and youth,<sup>9</sup> including decision-making skills, teamwork, discipline, leadership, self-esteem, equity, lifelong physical activity, participation, and fair play.
- ✓ Promote participation in activities in physical activity programs and physical education classes that encourage lifelong physical activity behaviour.
- ✓ Maximize the amount of time that students spend actively participating in physical activity during physical education. Ensure that adequate equipment exists, or modify activities, so that “waiting” time to use the required equipment is minimized.
- ✓ Provide a variety of activities including both structured and non-structured types of activities and competitive and non-competitive activities in physical education classes. This will encourage participation by people of all skill, development, and confidence levels, as well as promote lifelong physical activity. This is particularly important for pre-adolescent and adolescent girls.<sup>10</sup>

- ✓ Provide specific messages when dealing with children and youth. For example, when customizing messages for youth, focus on physical activity as “cool”; for children, focus on physical activity as “fun”.
- ✓ Determine and incorporate targeted strategies to increase physical activity behaviours based on readiness to change tailored specifically to children.<sup>20</sup>
- ✓ Schools can expose students and staff to a comprehensive curriculum of physical activity outside of physical education programming, including, physical activity opportunities and programs at recess, at lunch, and after school, or intramural and inter-school sporting programs. Such exposure should ensure that these opportunities allow for structured and unstructured physical activities.
- ✓ Schools can provide more opportunities at recess periods to increase children’s physical activity levels, as research shows that children spend much of their recess time being inactive.<sup>21</sup> This research also suggests that modifications to school policies such as increasing the frequency of recesses, providing suitable facilities, and educating staff to prompt physical activity may contribute to higher physical activity.
- ✓ Promote extracurricular activities to students. Research indicates that extracurricular activities are positively associated with desirable academic behaviours, including good conduct, academic achievement, staying in school, and good social skills.<sup>14</sup>
- ✓ Ensure that extracurricular activities not only promote team sports such as basketball, soccer, and volleyball but also encourage physical activity clubs, featuring activities such as dance, yoga, and walking.
- ✓ Ensure that the extracurricular activities are “inclusive”, in that these programs meet the needs of all students (i.e. students of various skills, abilities, gender, etc.).<sup>9</sup>
- ✓ Provide access to transportation at no cost to and from extra-curricular physical activities outside of the school environment. This ensures access to participation of all students, regardless of their income capabilities.
- ✓ Consider reducing user fees for sports or physical activities undertaken during or after school hours. Instead, institute “everyone plays” policies for encouraging all students to participate in school-related and extra-curricular physical activities.
- ✓ Encourage and provide examples of physical activity related to different sexes, cultures and abilities or disabilities.<sup>31</sup>
- ✓ Physical education programs should encourage students to participate in physical activity outside of physical education classes and outside of school.<sup>19</sup> Provide incentives or awards recognizing students who participate in physical activity outside of the school environment.
- ✓ Seek input from students in the development, organization, and, for older the children, the administration of extracurricular activities, that would further encourage their interest and participation in physical activity.<sup>14</sup>

- ✓ Establish physical activity goals for students and track progress towards these goals.<sup>9</sup>
- ✓ Encourage seasonal activities or accommodate seasonal weather patterns and climate change<sup>32</sup> by providing appropriate facilities during the months when children's activities are typically in decline. This can include a focus on activities such as cross-country skiing, ski trips to local ski facilities, indoor soccer training, basketball, early-morning or after-school walking clubs in the halls, and so on.
- ✓ Establish policies in the school system which ensures availability of appropriate facilities, equipment, supplies, and supervision for physical activity to support the physical activity needs of all students.<sup>10</sup>
- ✓ Ensure that there is adequate protective equipment, to reduce incidence of personal injury.
- ✓ Ensure that the spaces and facilities for physical education and physical activity are safe, clean, well-lit environments. Also, ensure that the facilities and equipment, including playgrounds, gymnasiums, and so on, are maintained to current safety regulations.
- ✓ Encourage schools to obtain appropriate tools and resources to promote physical activity for children. These can include brochures or posters to references on how to build self-esteem and skill development in children.
- ✓ Provide incentives for physical activity. Examples of incentives include certificates or rewards for students who participate in physical activities; awards which recognize students' efforts in physical activities; hosting social events which publicly recognize students who participate in physical activities; and awards for classes involved in physical activities, which rotate between classrooms.
- ✓ Ensure that students participating in physical activity programs are free from discrimination, harassment, and intimidation.<sup>15</sup>
- ✓ Discourage policies or practices that withhold physical activity as punishment (such as no outdoor activity during recess for bad behaviour, running laps if students lose a game, etc.)
- ✓ Encourage using physical activity as a reward (such as extra recess or gym classes for good behaviour or academic achievement).
- ✓ Encourage students to participate in local and special physical activity events, such as Winter- and Summer-Active, Terry Fox Run, International Walk to School Day.
- ✓ Ensure that health promotion programs, either in conjunction with or separate from physical education classes, incorporate physical activity topics into the curriculum. Topics can include the benefits of physical activity, how to overcome barriers to physical activity, how to develop goals, how to establish a personal physical activity program, opportunities for physical activity in the community, definitions of fitness (including appropriate frequency, intensity, and time) and so on.

- ✓ Provide homework in physical education classes. This can include participation in community recreation programs, participation in special physical activity events, family-related physical activity, and so on.
- ✓ Develop innovative and easy ways of making physical activity “fun and interesting” to students. For example, when watching a favourite television show, count how many times a certain character is physically active in some way; ask students to count and log how many times they are active in a given time period (i.e. from 4:30 to 6:30), including activities such as house cleaning, walking the dog, playing, etc.<sup>20</sup>
- ✓ Recruit physical activity professionals to speak to students and staff throughout the year regarding specific aspects of physical activity. Examples of physical activity professionals include fitness leaders, professionals in national, provincial, or regional physical activity related organizations and health care professionals.
- ✓ Recruit local athletes or other public figures to “motivate or inspire” physical activity among students.
- ✓ Evaluate school programs regularly to ensure that school physical activity programs, facilities, and instruction meet student’s needs. To facilitate this process, use existing tools, such as CAHPERD’s *QDPE report card*. (see [www.cahperd.ca/e/qdpe/resouces.htm](http://www.cahperd.ca/e/qdpe/resouces.htm))
- ✓ Incorporate guidelines for physical activity into the school physical education curriculum. Health Canada and the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology have prepared some general guidelines for physical activity for children and youth<sup>33</sup>, similar to those available for adults and older adults.<sup>34,35</sup>
- ✓ Promote provincial or territorial testing in physical activity for children and youth. Some provinces have adopted mandatory provincial testing for subjects such as literacy.<sup>36</sup> Similar testing can be introduced for physical activity.
- ✓ Provide physical education teachers who are qualified to teach the subject.<sup>8</sup>
- ✓ Incorporate policies that require teachers, who are specifically involved in student’s physical activity, to receive training or development at least once a year to keep informed of current research and guidelines related to physical activity.
- ✓ Seek and provide teachers with appropriate resources concerning physical activity issues for children, including inclusion, gender issues, equity, guidelines for activity, and so on (see resources available through CAHPERD’s website at [www.cahperd.ca/e/qdpe/resouces.htm](http://www.cahperd.ca/e/qdpe/resouces.htm), and the Leisure Information Network at [www.lin.ca](http://www.lin.ca))
- ✓ Promote networking with other physical education teachers as a means of encouraging a quality physical activity program (see CAHPERD’s Physical Education Mentors Network at [www.cahperd.ca/e/qdpe/mentor.htm](http://www.cahperd.ca/e/qdpe/mentor.htm)).

### ***Providing a supportive environment through school***

As we have seen from the previous recommendations, schools can play a very important role in promoting physical activity through its physical education, and physical activity programming and curriculum. This in itself is important, but needs to be supported through a nurturing environment conducive to promoting healthy behaviours in general. This can include a range of supports, in so much that schools could:

- ✓ Ensure that school facilities are available to students in physical activity at various times including before school, recess, or after school. Moreover, a variety of facilities are important, as a lack of facilities are considered a barrier to the participation of adolescents in physical activity. In contrast, the physical activity of children is positively related to the access to convenient spaces, facilities and equipment.<sup>14</sup>
- ✓ Allow and encourage students or faculty to use the public address (PA) system in school to announce daily progress reports on school teams performance, physical activities planned in the school for the day, promotion of special physical activity events, and so on. Encourage students to prepare displays or bulletin boards related to physical activity.
- ✓ Post promotional information on physical activity (posters, brochures, etc.) strategically, to ensure students have the maximum amount of exposure to such information.<sup>14</sup>
- ✓ Incorporate physical activity themes into other classes. For example, in high schools: for computer classes, encourage the development of a web page which announces daily physical activity events; for journalism classes, assign work in which students interview local school athletes; for biology classes, examine the impact of physical activity on the body. In elementary schools: for english classes, assign essays in which a student has to write about their favourite physical activity, including how to perform the activity, the benefits of the activity, etc.
- ✓ Promote active commuting of students to and from schools. Schools can consult existing programs such as Go for Green's (a national organization) national program, entitled *Active & Safe Routes to School*, which encourages the use of active modes of transportation to get to and from school.<sup>24</sup> These initiatives include the *Walking School Bus* program for young children which encourages safety and traffic awareness, the *Biking School Bus* program for older children which includes a focus on bike safety, and *International Walk to School Day*.<sup>26</sup> Both "active transportation" programs include an element of adult supervision. Similarly, in the United States, *KidsWalk-to-School* is an adaptable program which encourages children to be active, learn safety skills and learn about their environment.<sup>37</sup>
- ✓ Provide facilities or amenities to promote active commuting. This includes the provision of showers, change rooms, and secure bicycle racks.
- ✓ Provide comprehensive health services that promote positive health behaviours, including the importance of regular physical activity to well-being, prevention of

chronic disease, healthy eating and so on.<sup>11</sup> These types of services can also include guidance or counselling services.

- ✓ Ensure a healthy school environment by encouraging good nutrition and healthy eating among students.
- ✓ Ensure a good supply of nutritious snacks through the cafeteria and vending services. As an alternative, provide less expensive healthy food options and more expensive unhealthy options.<sup>14</sup> Strategically post information on healthy eating, such as posters on the Canada Food Guide.<sup>38</sup>
- ✓ Provide adequate training for staff and volunteers who teach physical activity to students. Ensure the availability of appropriate resources, including guidelines for physical activity, current research, or curriculum support resources.
- ✓ Encourage an emphasis on the health benefits and importance of physical activity in the curriculum of undergraduate and graduate work in teachers' education, and as ongoing professional development.<sup>10</sup>
- ✓ Encourage school personnel to also be physically active during recess, lunch hours, before and after school. These individuals are in an influential position to act as role models for appropriate physical activity behaviour.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Creating partnerships with the community***

Support from various facets of the community play a very important role in supporting and maintaining the physical activity of children and youth. These can include partnerships or linkages with the facilities and programs available in the community (including parks and outdoor spaces, sports and recreation facilities, public and private facilities and programs for physical activity), local physical activity and sports organizations, private business, the health care sector, as well as with family members. This type of support may manifest itself through physical supports of facilities, programs, and other opportunities, as well as social supports, including role modelling, encouragement, or guidance.

### **Community involvement**

- ✓ Develop cooperative agreements between school boards and municipalities to share use of facilities and human resources (e.g. community access to school facilities or school access to community facilities). Community health departments could work in conjunction with educators to ensure that physical activity facilities are used effectively and that barriers for children and youth to physical activity are reduced.<sup>39</sup>
- ✓ Provide access to school facilities for groups participating in physical activity outside of school hours. For example, consider offering physical activity programming on the weekends, before and after school, in the evenings, or during the summer months.

- ✓ Ensure that the hours and location of community programming and facilities for physical activity are suitable and meet the needs of students for participating in physical activity outside of school hours.
- ✓ Support family-oriented programming and facilities, including provide safe and affordable child-care programs in facilities where parents can do their own physical activities or arrange or simultaneous programming for parents and children.
- ✓ Develop changes in the community environment, include making stairs accessible and convenient, restricting some streets for walking or bicycling only, or encouraging mixed land use (business, residential, shopping, etc.) in new community developments, which encourage active commuting to local facilities.<sup>40</sup>
- ✓ Encourage the use of facilities *not specifically designed* for children's physical activity, especially in more rural or small communities that do not have access to many physical activity facilities. For example, meeting rooms in churches and other places of worship offer an opportunity to support and encourage physical activity.

### **Parental and familial involvement**

- ✓ Promote parental involvement in school physical activity functions. Invite parents to volunteer at recess, lunch hour, to help coach an after school activity, or to attend their child's extracurricular physical activities.
- ✓ Encourage parents to reduce or regulate children's inactive behaviours, including television viewing or video games. Television viewing habits of children need to be reviewed on a regular basis by parents, as high levels of television viewing has been associated with obesity.<sup>41,42</sup>
- ✓ Promote parental encouragement of children's activity. Research shows that parental encouragement is correlated with higher levels of physical activity in children.
- ✓ Encourage parents to model appropriate physically active behaviour, help children establish physical activity goals, reinforce physical activity with rewards when goals are achieved, and organize family activities that include physical activity.

### **Health care involvement**

- ✓ Provide education and interventions directed towards promotion of physical activity through the health care system. Health care professionals could explain the risk factors of chronic conditions in later life with sedentary behaviour in youth, help families guide and tailor physical activity programs for children and youth, describe the role of physical activity in weight management, skill development and building self-esteem.
- ✓ Assist schools in providing information on how to address the physical activity needs of children and youth, especially as they relate to disability, injury prevention, or chronic illness.<sup>43</sup>

- ✓ Help identify barriers to physical activity, and provide concrete steps on how to overcome such barriers.
- ✓ Provide advice on how to effectively and safely increase physical activity levels of children and youth.<sup>43</sup>
- ✓ Seek assistance or input from the school nurse when developing physical activity programming in schools.