

Using Physical Activity and Recess for Success - Not Discipline - in Schools

Background

Physical activity improves a child's physical, mental and cognitive health. Currently, only 48% of Colorado's children ages 5-14 years meet the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity. There is growing research to support that 60 minutes of activity per day has a positive connection to health, decreased chronic illness, and improved concentration, classroom behaviors and academic achievement. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Heart Association have recommended that children should be physically active at school for a minimum of 30 minutes per day, which is in alignment with the Colorado Physical Activity Bill.

On April 19, 2011, Governor Hickenlooper signed into law HB 11-1069: Physical Activity in Schools, which establishes a minimum requirement for the amount of time that each elementary school provides students opportunities to be physically active during the school day. Districts are required to establish policy, of which individual schools must align their policies and comply with the monthly minute requirement provisions beginning in the 2011-2012 school year.

The Benefits of Physical Activity During the School Day

We recognize the many challenges facing Colorado teachers and administrators; however, it is proven that physical activity improves children's academic performance and behavior in the classroom. Results from studies regarding school-based physical activity, which includes physical education, recess, physical activity breaks, conclude:

- Physical activity can help improve academic achievement, including grades and standardized test scores.
- Physical activity positively impacts cognitive skills, attention, and on-task classroom behavior.¹
- Students who are physically fit are likely to have stronger academic performance, better school attendance and fewer disciplinary problems.²
- In students with attention deficit disorder, greater moderate to vigorous physical activity is associated with improved attention, memory, information processing and decreased impulsivity.
- Daily recess of 15 minutes or more is associated with better teacher's rating of classroom behavior.³
- Physical activity improves cerebral blood flow, capillary growth, nerve cell growth, nerve connections and neurotrophins.⁴

Colorado School Physical Activity Requirements

HB11-1069 establishes a minimum number of minutes during the school day that students have the opportunity to engage in physical activity. The minimum number of minutes varies according to a school's and a student's schedule:

- Schools that meet five days per week
 - Full-time students = 600 minutes per month (an average of 30 minutes per day)
 - Half-time students = 300 minutes per month (an average of 15 minutes per day)

¹ US Dept. of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; *The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education and Academic Performance*, July 2010.

² Active Education; *Physical Education, Physical Activity and Academic Performance*, *Active Living Research*, 2009.
http://www.activelivingresearch.org/files/Active_Ed_Summer2009.pdf

³ Gapin, *The Effects of Physical Activity on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Symptoms*; *Preventive Medicine*, 52, 2011, s70-74.

⁴ Barros, *School Recess and Group Classroom Behavior*; *Pediatrics*, Vol 123, No 2, Feb 2009 431-436.

- Schools that meet fewer than five days per week
 - Full-time students = 30 minutes per day
 - Half-time students = 15 minutes per day

Recess is a Best Practice

While a school may satisfy the requirements for physical activity in multiple ways, providing recess is one of the best practices schools can adopt. Numerous recent national studies found that children who have more recess time behave better in the classroom and are likely to learn more. Other ways schools may satisfy the requirements of HB 11-1069 can include, but are not limited to: physical education classes, fitness breaks, classroom activities that include physical activity, exercise programs and field trips that include physical activity.

Physical Activity as a Disciplinary Measure

LiveWell Colorado strongly discourages withholding recess or other opportunities for physical activity from children as a punishment for poor behavior; rather we encourage using extra recess or physical activity time as a reward.

Punishment – NO!

- 60 Alternatives to Withholding Recess
 - Examples – letter of apology, make up work during free choice time, behavior chart, etc.
 - Complete List - <http://www.peacefulplaygrounds.com/recess-alt.htm>
- American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance - Policy Statement Against Physical Activity as Punishment and/or Behavior Management
 - <http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/standards/upload/Physical-Activity-as-Punishment-to-Board-12-10.pdf>

Rewards – YES!

- Healthy Rewards
 - Examples – Praise, Extra Recess, Non-Food Prize Box, Special Field Trip, etc.
 - Complete List - http://www.candoonline.org/sites/default/files/C9_HealthyRewards.pdf
- Healthy School Parties
 - Examples – healthy snacks, balloon relay races, dance party, etc.
 - Complete List - http://www.candoonline.org/sites/default/files/C7_HealthyParties.pdf
- Let's Move in Schools
 - Examples – PTA/PTO Toolkit, Physical Education Teacher Toolkits, Free Webinar Series
 - Complete List - <http://www.aahperd.org/letsmoveinschool//index.cfm?cid=00039>

About LiveWell Colorado

LiveWell Colorado is a nonprofit organization committed to preventing and reducing obesity in Colorado by promoting healthy eating and active living. Leading a comprehensive approach, LiveWell Colorado inspires and advances policy, environmental and lifestyle changes that aim to provide every Coloradan with access to healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity in the places they live, work, learn and play. LiveWell Colorado's strategic partners and funders are The Colorado Health Foundation, Kaiser Permanente and the Kresge Foundation, and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

For more information about LiveWell Colorado, visit www.livewellcolorado.org.