



## Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs

A Position Statement from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) recommends that all PK-12 schools implement a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program.

Schools play an important role in public health, and the physical, mental, and social benefits of regular physical activity for youth are well documented. Leading public health, medical, and educational organizations, including NASPE, have made important physical activity recommendations for school-aged youth (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1997; Kaplan et al., 2005; NASPE, 2000; Pate et al. 2006; U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). These recommendations are for children to accumulate at least 60 minutes of physical activity on all or most all days of the week. (CDC, 2001; CSMF/CSH, 2006; Kaplan et al., 2005; Pate et al., 2006; NASPE, 2004; Strong et al., 2005; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004). In addition to physical activity recommendations, most of these agencies and organizations also include calls for schools to assume strong leadership roles in the education and promotion of physical activity among children (CDC, 1997; Kaplan et al., 2005; Pate et al., 2006; USDHHS, 1996; WHO, 2001). Conclusions drawn from the results of the 2006 School Health Policies and Programs Study (SHPPS) conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention include the need to implement a comprehensive approach at the state, district, and school levels to enhance physical education and physical activity in schools (Lee et al. 2007).

In 2004, federal legislation (PL 108-265) was passed which required all districts with federally funded school meal programs to develop and implement wellness policies by the beginning of the 2006-07 school year. The *Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004* directs school districts to set goals for physical activity, nutrition education, campus food provision, and other school-based activities designed to encourage student wellness. Furthermore, districts are required to engage a wide range of individuals in policy development and to have a plan for measuring policy implementation. Implementation of these wellness plans should result in an increase in school-based opportunities for physical activity.

A Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP) encompasses physical activity programming before, during, and after the school day. NASPE

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recommends that a CSPAP include: quality physical education; school-based physical activity opportunities; school employee wellness and involvement; and family and community involvement.

### **Quality Physical Education**

Quality physical education serves as the foundation of the CSPAP. According to NASPE (2004), a quality physical education program includes:

- Daily physical education (at least 150 minutes per week for elementary, and 225 minutes per week for middle/high school)
- A curriculum that meets the National Standards for Physical Education
- Student assessment aligned with instruction
- A certified physical education teacher providing meaningful content through standards-based instruction
- A pupil-teacher ratio equivalent to that in the classroom context
- Adequate equipment to promote maximum practice time

Research shows that quality physical education programs can contribute to students' regular participation in physical activity (Fairclough & Stratton, 2005; Luepker et al., 1996; Morgan, Beighle, Pangrazi, in press; NASPE, 2003; Sallis, McKenzie, Alcaraz, Kolody, Faucette, & Hovell, 1997), and can increase student participation in moderate to vigorous physical activity (CDC, 2001). Quality physical education is at the core of a CSPAP because of its role in helping students gain the knowledge and skills to become proficient movers and participants in a lifetime of physical activity (Baranowski et al., 1997; NASPE, 2004). Within the CSPAP, certified physical educators not only teach physical education classes, but also serve as physical activity leaders in their schools and promote physical activity both within and beyond the regular school day.

### **School-based Physical Activity Opportunities**

Along with physical education classes, students need physical activity opportunities throughout the school day to meet the recommended minimum requirements of at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day. These physical activity opportunities are not to take the place of physical education, but rather supplement physical activity time accumulated during physical education class, and use the skills and knowledge learned in physical education to successfully be physically active.

During the school day, children and youth need a "break" from sedentary activities in the classroom. Physical activity breaks meet this need and can increase individuals' daily physical activity levels. Integrating physical activity programs in the school day has not been shown to decrease academic achievement. In fact, in some cases it may even enhance academic performance (Dywer, 1983; Sallis, McKenzie, Kolody et al., 1999; Shephard, LaVallee, Volle, LaBarre, & Beaucage, 1994; Shephard, 1997). Sedentary classroom activities

should be interspersed with bouts of physical activity, and when possible have movement integrated into the academic content. Classroom physical activity helps to mediate often cited barriers to learning such as inattentiveness and misbehavior (Mahar et al., 2006; Pelligrini et al., 1995).

For elementary school students, recess can be utilized to provide opportunities for students to accumulate meaningful amounts of physical activity (Beighle, Morgan, Le Masurier, & Pangrazi, 2006; Jago & Baranowski, 2004; Johns & Ha, 1999; Mota et al., 2005; Ridgers & Stratton, 2005). NASPE's position statement on Recess for Elementary School Students states that all elementary school children should be provided with at least one daily period of recess for a minimum of 20 minutes, and provides information on the importance of recess for a child's physical, social, and academic development (NASPE, 2006). In middle and high schools, students might spend free time, such as during lunch or study hall, participating in "drop in" physical activity sessions. For example, students might visit a supervised fitness center or check out a pedometer to monitor steps walked on campus during an unencumbered period.

Physical activity opportunities and programs occurring before and after the regular school hours, including intramural and interscholastic programs, have great potential for increasing overall daily physical activity levels of youth (Allison & Adlaf, 2000; Kaplan et al., 2005; NASPE, 2002a; NASPE, 2002b; Powers et al., 2002; Yin et al., 2005; Young et al., 2007), and should be included in a CSPAP. Intramural programs are those offered within the school environment and should provide a diverse selection of physical activity opportunities that meet the needs, interests, and abilities of most students. All students should be given the opportunity to participate in intramural activities, and special consideration should be given to those with particular physical activity needs and who are at-risk for a sedentary lifestyle (e.g., children with physical and other disabilities, those with chronic illnesses, those who are overweight).

Intramural activities can include sports (e.g., volleyball and basketball), self-directed activities (e.g., walking and jogging), classes (e.g., dance, yoga, or martial arts), and activity clubs (e.g., jump rope, hiking, and fitness). These activities can be offered before school begins, as well as after school. Other before-school activities designed to increase physical activity might include large group energizing sessions and/or a variety of small group physical activities from which students can choose.

Interscholastic sports programs are an important part of the American culture and provide physical activity opportunities for the more skillful students, particularly in middle and high schools. They should be offered in addition to school intramural programs.

Students and staff are encouraged to take active transport to school, such as walking and biking. Students who walk or bike to school generally expend more energy overall throughout the day (Tudor-Locke, Neff, Ainsworth, Addy, & Popkins, 2002; Tudor-Locke, Ainsworth, Adair, & Popkin, 2003) and this may particularly help overweight students (Rosenberg et al., 2006).

In providing school-based physical activity opportunities, efforts should be made to stimulate interest and participation from the greatest proportion of students in the school. This requires offering a wide variety of activities including non-competitive and health-enhancing choices. Consideration should also be given to providing opportunities at various times so that participation is feasible for all children (Lounsbery, Bungum, & Smith, 2007).

### **School Employee Wellness and Involvement**

School employee wellness programs as well as staff involvement in the CSPAP implementation are important to school-wide success. School employee wellness programs have been shown to improve staff health, increase physical activity levels, and be cost effective (Eaton, Marx, & Bowie, 2007). Therefore, schools should plan and implement activities, policies, and incentive programs for faculty and staff members to encourage participating in and modeling a healthy lifestyle that includes physical activity. When school leaders are personally committed to good health practices, they serve as positive role models and may show increased support for student participation in physical activity.

Strong administrative support and staff involvement in the CSPAP are critical to school program success. School staff can assume various roles, such as volunteer sponsor, planner, and supervisor of activity-based events and programs (e.g., playground, recess, after school teams and clubs). The support, interest, and availability of the staff is critical to effective implementation of a CSPAP. Incentives, including stipends for extra standard duties, to increase the number of teacher/coach volunteers should be considered to support efforts in the CSPAP. Orientation and training should be offered to all school staff to facilitate cooperation and collaboration in implementing all components of the CSPAP.

### **Family and Community Involvement**

The role of the school in promoting physical activity should extend beyond the school campus to reach families and collaborate with community members. Parents are an integral part of students' lives and can impact their physical activity levels (Nader et al., 1996; Ornelas, Perreira, & Ayala, 2007; Welk, Wood & Morss, 2003). Therefore, activities and events that include families, before, during, or outside the school day, are encouraged. Examples include family fun/fitness nights, after school classes for families, and use of facilities for family active participation after school and on weekends. Parents should be provided with information on the importance of physical activity and with strategies to

promote their children's physical activity opportunities outside of school. This might include sharing information about physical activity and physical education on a regular basis through a variety of written, web-based, and event media outlets.

Additional physical activity opportunities can be made available to students through school collaboration with community-based providers of physical activity (Jago & Baranowski, 2004; Stevens et al., 2005). These collaborations could include: the use of school facilities for community recreation; the use of community facilities and programs for promoting student/family physical activity; and the sharing of personnel and other resources to help provide more PA opportunities for all (Pate et al., 2006). Collaborative efforts to provide transportation from school to community facilities can increase student participation.

### **Action Statement**

To fully establish a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program, NASPE recommends that schools implement the following steps:

1. Appoint a committee to develop and oversee the CSPAP. This committee, perhaps a sub-committee of the School Wellness Policy Committee, should be comprised of (but not limited to) physical educators, health teachers, other teachers, administrators, parents, students, community members, and other stakeholders who can help facilitate the school's plan.
2. Conduct a baseline assessment of the CSPAP components as they currently exist in the school.
3. Create a vision statement and action plan appropriate to the specific school, addressing each of the four components of a CSPAP.
  - a. The action plan should include the baseline assessment, objectives, activities to meet each objective, defined outcomes, timelines, and persons responsible for each CSPAP component area:
    - Quality physical education
    - Before-school strategies
    - During-school strategies (outside of physical education)
    - After-school strategies
    - Staff personal wellness
    - School employee wellness and involvement in the school's CSPAP
    - Family and community involvement
4. Implement the Action Plan

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