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## Policy Roundtable to Focus on Physical Activity in Schools, and Child & Adolescent Obesity in Rhode Island

*This Policy Brief reports on Rhode Island school personnel experience with the various components of comprehensive school physical activity programs, based on a survey conducted by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.*

**Providence, RI (March 27, 2017):** Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will release a new *Policy Brief: A Snapshot of Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs in Rhode Island* at a roundtable on Thursday, March 30, 2017, from 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. at the Providence Marriott Downtown, One Orms Street, Providence, RI. Featured speakers will include Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and Kim A. Keck, President and CEO of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst Jim Beasley will share the findings from the *Policy Brief* on physical activity in schools, including recess and physical education.

### **The Importance of Physical Activity for Children and Adolescents**

Childhood obesity in America has more than tripled over the past four decades, from 5% in 1974 to 17% in 2014. There are several measures in Rhode Island that show similar increases.

Regular physical activity has been shown to improve strength and endurance, help control weight, and prevent chronic disease. It has also been shown to improve academic achievement, including grades and standardized test scores. Research also shows positive effects on the brain, including improved attention, concentration, memory, coping, and reducing anxiety and depression.

While no single factor is driving the increased prevalence of obesity, increasing physical activity is one strategy that can be taken along with others to help prevent and reduce the burden of child and adolescent obesity. However, too few children and youth are physically active for the recommended 60 minutes per day. In Rhode Island, 53% of middle school students and 44% of high school students reported being physically active for at least an hour per day on five or more days in 2015, ranking them 24th lowest among 36 ranked states on that high school measure.

“Physically active children have more active brains,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “When children are given the opportunity to move more throughout the day, they are better able to fulfill their potential. The information in this *Policy Brief* can help policymakers, elected officials, and community leaders make informed decisions for improved health and education outcomes for Rhode Island children, in and out of the classroom.”

The *Policy Brief* was developed with the support of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island. “Promoting physical activity and other healthy habits in kids sets the foundation for a lifetime of wellness,” said Kim Keck, President and CEO of BCBSRI. “Our continued partnership with Rhode Island KIDS COUNT on this *Policy Brief* highlights the important work needed in our state to address the critical issue of childhood obesity.”

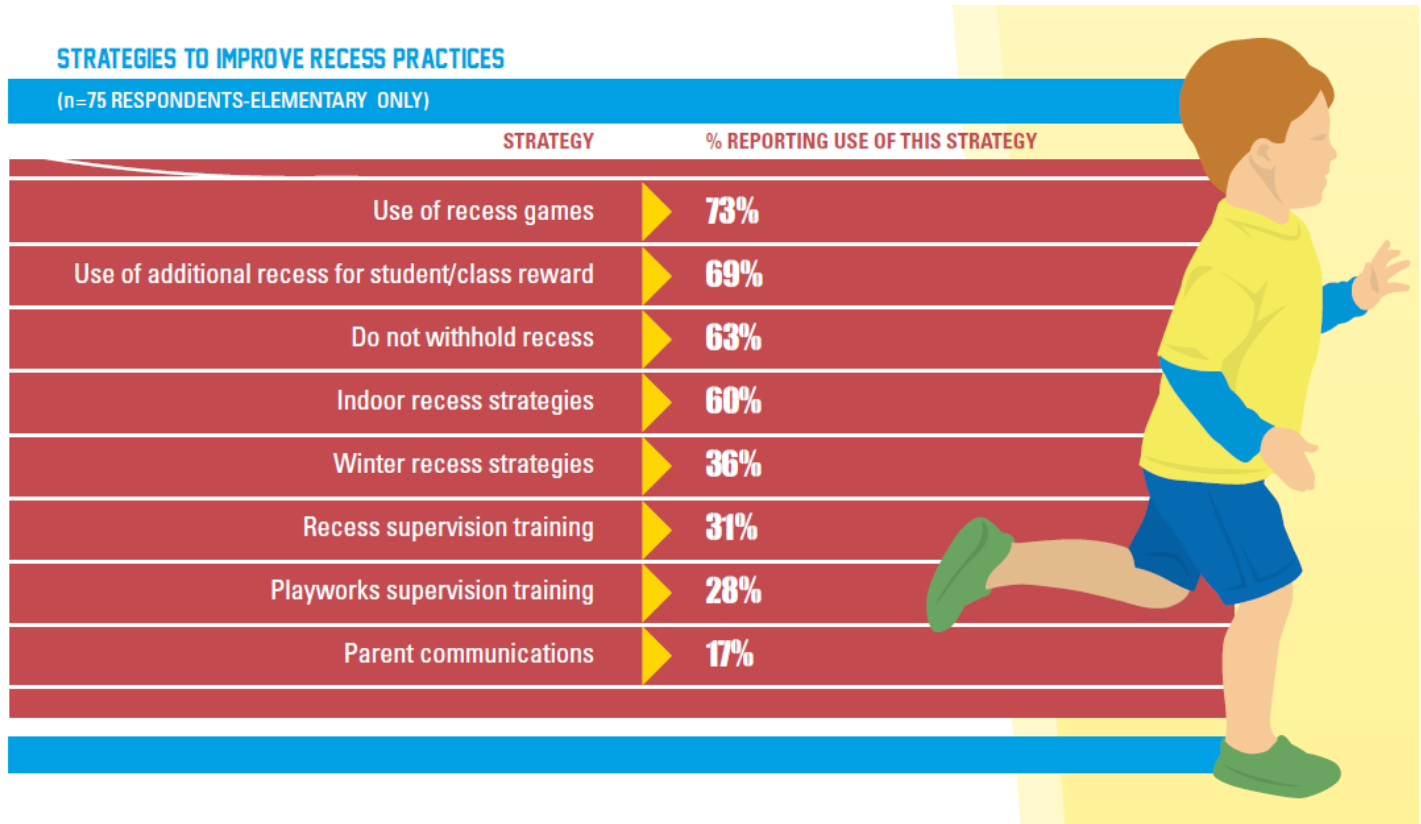
**Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP):** CSPAP is a multi-component approach in which school districts and schools use all opportunities for students to be physically active, meet the nationally-recommended 60 minutes of physical activity each day, and develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence to be physically active. Successful CSPAP programs actively collaborate with school staff, parents, and community members to create an environment and culture that promotes a lifetime of physical activity.

In the fall of 2016, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, in conjunction with the Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition and the Rhode Island Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, surveyed school wellness leaders, physical educators, and professionals. Results presented in this media release are from this survey. For more information about the survey, please see page 2 of the *Policy Brief*.

**Physical Activity in Rhode Island Schools**

**Recess:** National recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are that recess not be withheld for disciplinary reasons, recess duration should be at least 20 minutes, and that indoor recess should be offered when weather is inclement.

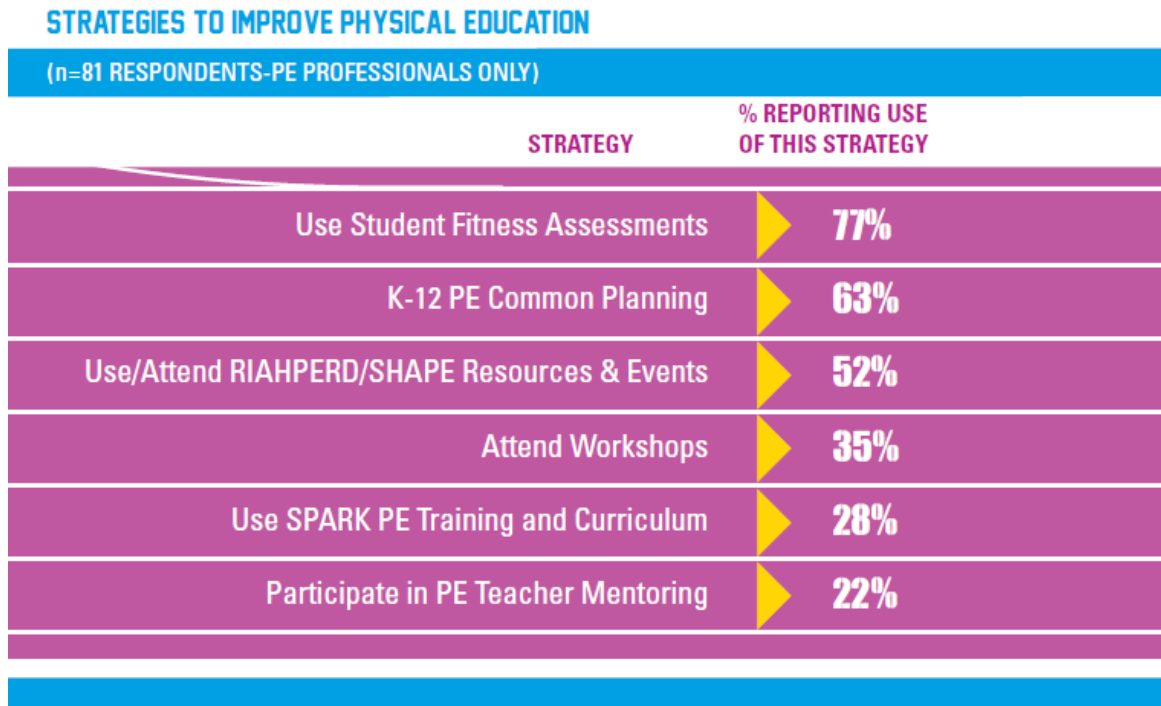
In recognition of the many social, emotional, physical, and cognitive benefits of recess, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed the *Free Play Recess Act* in 2016. This law requires at least 20 consecutive minutes of free-play recess daily for all children attending public elementary schools that serve children in grades kindergarten through six, starting in the 2016-2017 school year. Survey respondents reported a wide range of strategies that they employ to ensure that recess is available and active.



**Physical education (PE):** PE is another opportunity for all children to learn about and engage in developmentally-appropriate vigorous or moderate physical activity safely under the direct supervision of a trained educator during the school day.

In Rhode Island in 2015, 12% of middle school students and 31% of high school students reported attending PE classes one or fewer times per week. Low PE attendance rates are higher among Hispanic (14% of middle school students and 44% of high school students), Black (13% and 37% respectively), and multiple race (11% and 40% respectively) students than their white peers (11% and 23% respectively).

PE teachers who responded to the survey reported a variety of strategies they use to ensure that high-quality PE is available for students.



**Physical Activity During the Day in the Classroom:** Students need additional opportunities for physical activity throughout the school day aside from their high-quality PE classes. Most elementary and middle school students spend only 10%-40% percent of PE time engaged in vigorous- or moderate-intensity physical activity (MVPA), and a national study found that high school students engage in little MVPA. Integrating physical activity within classrooms at all grade levels — as part of planned lessons or through scheduled breaks — can help students meet the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity, improve attentiveness, and increase their time-on-task.

The *Policy Brief* provides recommendations for promoting increased physical activity in schools. Please see page 8 for the full set of recommendations.

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*Rhode Island KIDS COUNT* is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.

*The Policy Brief* was developed with the support of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island.