

A SNAPSHOT OF COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMS IN RHODE ISLAND

Childhood obesity in America has more than tripled over the past four decades, from 5% in 1974 to 17% in 2014 (the most recent year for which national data is available).¹ There are several measures in Rhode Island that show similar increases, among very young children, school-age children, and adolescents.^{2,3,4,5,6}

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 in 2015.^{7,8}

Physical activity helps children and youth develop healthy bones, control their weight, improves their strength, endurance, and blood pressure, and reduces the risk for obesity and other chronic diseases. Regular physical activity has also been shown to have positive effects on the brain, improving attention, memory, and concentration and reducing depression and anxiety.

Physical activity also improves academic achievement, including grades and standardized test scores, as well as academic behavior, such as time on task.^{9,10,11}

One strategy that communities can take to prevent and reduce obesity is for schools and districts to enact a **comprehensive school physical activity program (CSPAP)**, which is a multi-component model that provides students opportunities to be physically active for at least 60 minutes per day.^{12,13}

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.



PHYSICALLY ACTIVE KIDS HAVE MORE ACTIVE BRAINS

Brain Scans of Students Taking A Test:

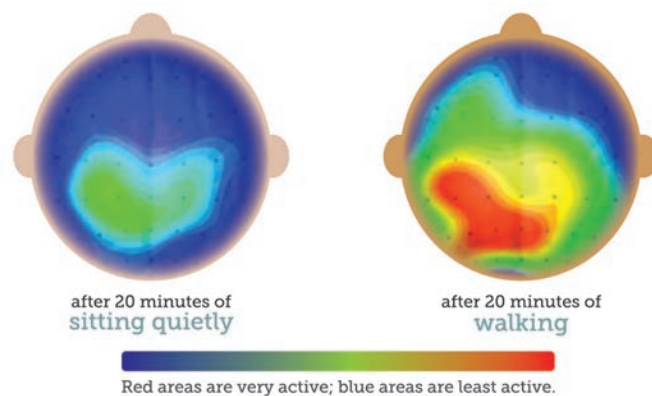
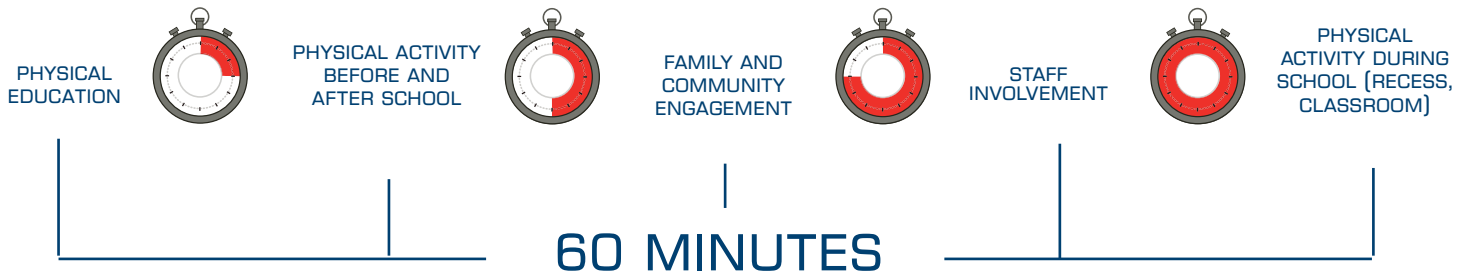


Image courtesy of Charles Hillman, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Source: *Active education: Growing evidence on physical activity and academic performance*. (2015). San Diego, CA: Active Living Research.

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 for a lifetime. Students can accumulate the recommended amount of physical activity through the provision of the multi-component CSPAP.

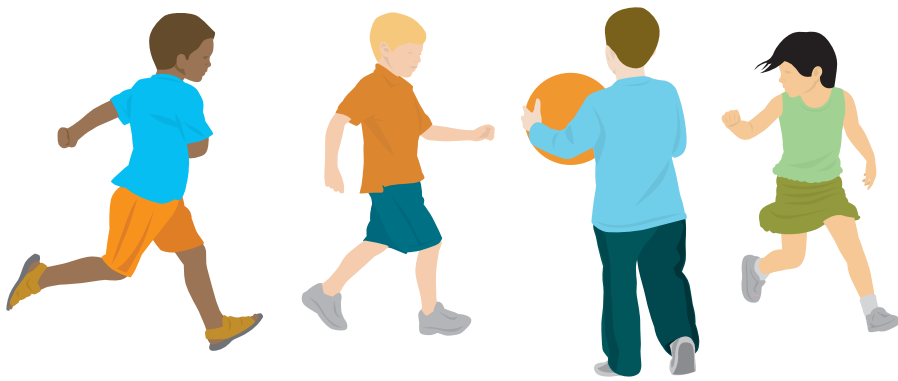


- In 2016, 5% of Rhode Island middle school and high school principals reported having a CSPAP at their school.¹⁴
- When prioritized, coordinated, and implemented with strong support from school administrators, ongoing engagement by staff and community members, and active leadership from physical educators, CSPAPs can help to increase daily physical activity of students, which can in turn lead to improved physical health and improved ability to learn.¹⁵

OVERVIEW OF THE SURVEY

In the fall of 2016, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, in conjunction with the Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition (RIHSC), and the Rhode Island Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (RIAPERD), surveyed school wellness leaders, physical educators, and professionals. The purpose of the survey was to identify promising practices currently being implemented to increase physical activity levels of Rhode Island students. The survey was conducted online, via a link to a Survey Monkey tool that was created by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, and shared with educators via professional association listserves and school wellness committee email lists. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT conducted the analyses of the results.

Of the 214 respondents, 41% (87) worked at the elementary level, 22% (48) at the middle school level, 25% (54) at the high school level, and 14% (31) at the district level. Respondents reported working in 29 Rhode Island cities and towns, with the most coming from Central Falls (11%), Woonsocket (11%), Cranston (10%), Lincoln (7%), and Portsmouth (7%). Most who answered were physical education teachers (44%) and school administrators (27%), while other teachers (9%), school wellness committee members (5%), and other professionals (14%) also responded. This survey used a convenience sample, and therefore these findings represent only a point-in-time snapshot of the views and experiences of those who responded. These findings cannot be generalized to the entire state.¹⁶



SNAPSHOT IMPROVING RECESS IN RHODE ISLAND

Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition (RIHSC), and Playworks New England use a collaborative model to collectively enhance the recess experience across the state through #RecessRocksInRI. Together they provide resources, training, and support to elementary schools regarding ways in which to enact evidenced-based recess curriculum that has been shown to increase physical activity, feelings of school safety, reduced bullying, and improved readiness to learn. In 2016, 99 elementary school professionals that serve 7,322 children in 18 schools in Rhode Island (Bristol Warren, Central Falls, Coventry, Cumberland, Lincoln, North Kingstown, North Providence, and Providence) were provided with this training. An additional 18 elementary schools (across seven districts) that serve 7,440 children will receive this training in 2017.^{25,26,27}

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DURING THE DAY RECESS

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. It also discourages teachers from withholding recess for punitive reasons.^{17,18} Prior to this legislation, only 10 public school districts in Rhode Island required 20 minutes or more of daily recess.¹⁹

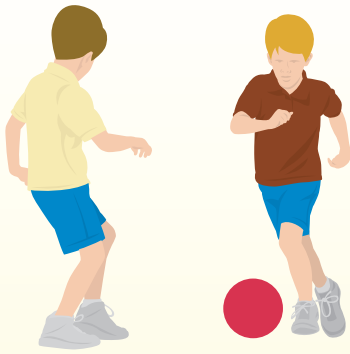
Some schools have gone even further to offer even more recess time - Barrington, Lincoln, and New Shoreham districts, as well as a private school in East Greenwich, offer 30 minutes of recess for their elementary students.^{20,21,22} Research has shown that physical activity (rather than increased class time), can yield improved academic performance. Given that active kids do better academically than children who are sedentary, primary school-aged children in Finland and Japan have 10- to 15-minute recess breaks every hour. In addition, six public and private schools in Texas implemented four 15-minute recess blocks in 2016, and schools in Kansas and Ohio are also exploring this option.^{23,24}

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE RECESS PRACTICES

(n=75 RESPONDENTS-ELEMENTARY ONLY)

STRATEGY	% REPORTING USE OF THIS STRATEGY
Use of recess games	73%
Use of additional recess for student/class reward	69%
Do not withhold recess	63%
Indoor recess strategies	60%
Winter recess strategies	36%
Recess supervision training	31%
Playworks supervision training	28%
Parent communications	17%





SNAPSHOT NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PE TEACHERS

Many PE teachers reported a lack of professional development for their field in this survey. Of the 49 PE teachers who described the professional development opportunities that were recently provided, 20 indicated that none specific to PE were offered. Some PE teachers even highlighted administrative barriers to attending related professional development opportunities, like having to use personal time to attend.²⁸

This desire for increased PE training and a lack of prioritization for it by school leaders was also highlighted in another survey, the *2016 Rhode Island Middle and High School Health Profile Report* released by the Rhode Island Department of Health and the Rhode Island Department of Education. Thirty-four percent of lead health education teachers reported receiving professional development on physical activity and fitness within the last two years, despite 66% indicating they would like to receive such professional development. Twenty-seven percent of Rhode Island middle and high school principals with school improvement plans reported including objectives on PE in 2016.²⁹

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education (PE) curriculum and instruction are designed to develop age-appropriate motor skills, knowledge and behaviors of physical fitness, sportsmanship, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and active living.³⁰ In Rhode Island, students are required to receive an average of 20 minutes per day of health and PE instruction.³¹ Nationally, the daily recommended amount of PE alone is 30 minutes in elementary school and 45 minutes in middle and high school.³²

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).³³

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE PHYSICAL EDUCATION

(n=81 RESPONDENTS-PE PROFESSIONALS ONLY)

STRATEGY	% REPORTING USE OF THIS STRATEGY
Use Student Fitness Assessments	77%
K-12 PE Common Planning	63%
Use/Attend RIAHPERD/SHAPE Resources & Events	52%
Attend Workshops	35%
Use SPARK PE Training and Curriculum	28%
Participate in PE Teacher Mentoring	22%

Rhode Island PE teachers who responded to this survey indicated using a wide variety professional development, curriculum, and district practices regularly to implement a high-quality PE program for their students, despite the limited time that students have for PE.³⁴





**PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
DURING THE DAY**

IN THE CLASSROOM

Students need additional opportunities for physical activity throughout the school day aside from their high-quality physical education classes. Most elementary and middle school students spend only 10%-40% of PE time engaged in vigorous- or moderate-intensity physical activity (MVPA) and a national representative sample of U.S. adolescents found that high school students engage in little MVPA.

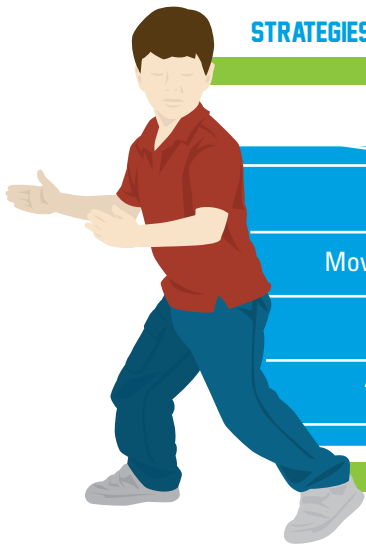
Integrating physical activity within classrooms at all grade levels - as part of planned lessons or through scheduled breaks - can help students meet the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity, improve attentiveness, and increase their time-on-task.^{35,36,37,38}

SNAPSHOT FUEL UP TO PLAY 60 RI GRANTS

In Rhode Island, Fuel Up to Play 60 grants are provided to schools thanks to a partnership between the New England Dairy & Food Council, the Dairy Farm Families of Rhode Island and New England, and the New England Patriots. Grants upward of \$4,000 are provided to K-12 schools in support of their in-school healthful eating and physical activity initiatives. To be eligible for a Fuel Up to Play 60 grant, schools must participate in the National School Lunch Program and outline how a grant will be used to promote both physical activity and healthful eating initiatives.

Grants have recently been awarded to 33 schools in Bristol, Cranston, Lincoln, Newport, North Providence, Pawtucket, Portsmouth, Providence, Scituate, South Kingstown, and Westerly. Schools have used the grants towards physical education curriculum kits, exercise equipment, before and after school physical activity programming, coolers for mobile meal programs, and blenders for smoothies.⁴²

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN SCHOOL



	ELEMENTARY n=73	MIDDLE n=25	HIGH SCHOOL n=24	OVERALL* n=132
Physical activity breaks	92%	68%	46%	79%
Movement into academic content	56%	40%	54%	52%
Extra time in gym/playground	66%	44%	21%	51%
Alternative classroom seating (pedal desks, ball chairs, etc.)	67%	20%	21%	50%

In Rhode Island in 2016, 31% of middle and high school principals report implementing physical activity breaks in the classroom during the school day, outside of PE.³⁹ However, many Rhode Island educators provided a number of specific examples of how they have successfully integrated physical activity opportunities into the classroom through our survey.

Highlighted examples are the use of alternative seating (pedal desks, wiggle seats, ball chairs, and desk bands), incorporating brain breaks through the use of GoNoodle, Yoga 4 classrooms, F.I.T.Club, or S'cool Moves resources, having students keep an activity log, using time for physical activity as an incentive for positive student behavior or for students with behavior issues, and allowing students to enroll in a personal fitness elective in addition to PE as well as allowing the use of the gym during free time.^{40,41}

SNAPSHOT BOKS

Adoption of the BOKS (Build Our Kids' Success) physical activity before-school program is growing in Rhode Island. Since starting in 2012, there are now 42 schools and nonprofit organizations (i.e., the YMCA) in 17 communities (Barrington, Cranston, East Greenwich, Exeter, Lincoln, Narragansett, North Kingstown, Pawtucket, Peacedale, Providence, Rumford, Smithfield, Tiverton, Warwick, Woonsocket, and Wyoming) enrolled in the BOKS program. As BOKS is a free program, most sites are volunteer-run (31), while one district received funding to implement its BOKS program.

BOKS is mainly targeted for elementary school students, but there is curriculum available to support both early childhood and middle school sites, as well as for teachers to use during the day. All BOKS sites are provided with free training on how to implement a 12-week curriculum that provides children with 45 minutes of fun, non-competitive, kid-friendly activities that help them achieve moderate to vigorous physical activity before school starts through warm-ups, skills development, running, relay races, group games, and age-appropriate nutrition.⁴³

BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Providing physical activity opportunities before and after school is another strategy that can help children get 60 minutes of physical activity. Promising practices include walking and biking to school programs, physical activity clubs, intramural programs, interscholastic sports, and informal recreation or play on school grounds. Schools can also partner and collaborate with community-based organizations and/or child care programs, which can deliver programs and other opportunities for physical activity in school settings and beyond.^{44,45}

Participation in out-of school programming has many benefits for child development. When compared to their non-participating peers, young children and youth who participate in out-of-school programming are more likely to do well in school, avoid risky behaviors, and get sufficient physical activity.⁴⁶

Rhode Island educators report connecting children and youth to a number of before and after school physical opportunities/programs.

In 2016, Rhode Island middle school and high school principals reported the following in the *School Health Profile Report*,

- 90% offer interscholastic sports to students,
- 76% offer opportunities to participate in intramural sports programs or physical activity clubs,
- 60% have a joint use agreement for shared use of school or community physical activity facilities,
- 28% offer opportunities for students to participate in physical activity before the school day through organized physical activities or access to facilities or equipment for physical activity.⁴⁷

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL

(n=149 RESPONDENTS)

Physical activity clubs/intramural/extended learning opportunities	67%
Informal recreation or play on school grounds before/after school	45%
Use of school buildings for community fitness programs	43%
Walking/running club	22%
Walk/bike to school program	20%
Offer BOKS program	15%






STAFF, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

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. School staff can achieve this by providing opportunities for students to be active, and by modeling behavior through participation in employee wellness programs. Families are equally as important as they greatly influence youth participation in physical activity. Parents and other adults can encourage and model physical activity by participating or volunteering in CSPAP evening activities or special events, serving as physical activity volunteers, or engaging in regular physical activity with their child(ren).^{48,49}

Schools can also help promote and encourage physical activity at home and in the community through parent communications.⁵⁰ In Rhode Island, 44% of middle and high school lead education teachers reported providing parents and families with information regarding physical activity in 2016, an increase from 33% in 2008.⁵¹

STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE STAFF FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

	ELEMENTARY n=70	MIDDLE n=30	HIGH SCHOOL n=30	OVERALL* n=137
Field Days	97%	70%	43%	80%
Physical Activity-Oriented Fundraisers	44%	53%	50%	50%
Walk-a-thons	30%	47%	23%	36%
PE Staff Providing Expertise	26%	30%	43%	33%
Physical Activity Newsletters	24%	10%	23%	20%
Family Fitness Night	9%	7%	3%	10%



Best practices identified in this survey for engaging staff, parents, and community members in physical activity include hosting family event evenings that include racing, sporting activities, and wellness stations, hosting annual district/school walks, jog-a-thons, or 5Ks, having field days or fitness festivals for students, providing parent workshops on health, physical activity and nutrition, providing bimonthly PE and physical activity newsletters, and inviting parents and teachers to participate in PE classes on occasion.⁵²

SNAPSHOT JUMP ROPE FOR HEART & HOOPS FOR HEART IN RHODE ISLAND

The American Heart Association in conjunction with the Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE) and RIAHPERD provide educational and fundraising events local communities and schools can adopt to empower elementary, middle, and high school students to improve their health and physical activity levels, while also allowing them to give back. Jump Rope For Heart and Hoops For Heart events are conducted in school by PE instructors, coaches, or teachers. Participating students are taught the value of community service, develop heart-healthy and physical activity habits, and join together in helping other kids with special hearts. During the 2015-2016 school year, nearly 10,000 Rhode Island student participants in 148 schools raised over \$496,000 through Jump Rope for Heart and Hoops for Heart to support heart research and education.^{53,54,55}

RECOMMENDATIONS



PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The number of minutes required for Physical Education (PE) in Rhode Island should be increased to 150 minutes per week for elementary school (30 minutes per day) and 225 minutes per week for middle and high school (45 minutes per day), with at least 50% of class-time dedicated to vigorous- or moderate-intensity physical activity. PE exemptions and waivers should continue to be prohibited.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PE teachers should be provided with annual professional development opportunities to strengthen the quality of PE. In addition, all educators (including early childhood educators) should be provided with training on how to incorporate physical activity regularly and safely in their classroom.

RECESS

All elementary schools should comply with Rhode Island's *Free Play Recess Act*, which will ensure that recess is available for a minimum of 20 minutes per day. School personnel should not withhold recess as punishment or for academic reasons or use recess time for remedial or extra academic instruction as it may be counterproductive to achieving desired educational outcomes. Recess should also optimally be scheduled before lunch and time should be extended beyond 20 minutes when possible. The Rhode Island Department of Education and other professional organizations should identify best practices for indoor recess strategies and regularly share with all school and early childhood programs.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY STRATEGIES AND SCHOOL POLICIES

Schools should expand additional physical activity opportunities for all students before, during and after school by implementing a comprehensive school physical activity program, with a particular focus on health equity and physical ability. Local school district Health and Wellness Subcommittees and assessment tools should be regularly used to implement, monitor, and communicate physical activity opportunities and progress. The Rhode Island Department of Education should regularly help support, encourage, and fund schools with this effort.

DATA COLLECTION & REPORTING

State-, district- and school-level self-reported data relating to physical activity and physical education behavior and policies should continue to be regularly reported by the Rhode Island Department of Education, Rhode Island Department of Health, and/or local school districts. The State Innovation Model (SIM) Steering Committee should accelerate progress on implementing policies and procedures for the routine collection of Body Mass Index (BMI) data recorded by a trained professional from electronic medical records so that demographic, geographic, and disparity data can be tracked and publicly reported.



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