



April 2016

# Governance Brief

## Integrating Physical Activity Into the School Day

*A Joint Publication of CSBA and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation*

Skills learned in the classroom impact students throughout their lives. The latest research shows those vital life skills are not just mental, but also physical. When students are physically active, they increase their opportunities to become better learners, achieve academic success, and to develop lifelong healthy habits.

There is a distinction between physical education and physical activity. Physical education is a class that is specifically focused on physical activity and physical activity is an active lifestyle. Research indicates the importance of school environments that support both physical education and physical activity by encouraging opportunities for movement throughout the day. A 2010 report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that when children are more active, their classroom behavior and focus on schoolwork improve.<sup>1</sup> These findings were reinforced by a recent study published in the journal *Preventive Medicine*, which found that implementing physical activity breaks is associated with improved classroom behavior.<sup>2</sup>

Experts recommend that students have at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily.<sup>3</sup> One of the best ways to ensure they get that is through high-quality physical education at school. California law requires that elementary school children have at least 200 minutes of physical education every 10 school days (an average of approximately 20 minutes a day) and that middle and high school students have at least 400 minutes of physical education every 10 school days (an average of approximately 40 minutes a day).

An active lifestyle is essential to improving the health of California students. Currently, more than 30 percent of California youth ages 10-17 are overweight or obese.<sup>4</sup> Students who are obese are more frequently absent from school than their peers, missing out on valuable learning time as well as opportunities for physical activity, thus perpetuating the cycle.<sup>5</sup> According to the 2014-15 FITNESSGRAM physical fitness tests, only 26.4% of

fifth-graders, 32.5% of seventh-graders, and 37.6% of ninth-graders scored in the Healthy Fitness Zone, the level of fitness that offers protection against diseases resulting from sedentary living.<sup>6</sup>

School leaders generally understand the importance of both physical and mental activity in school. A 2009 survey conducted by CSBA and California Project LEAN found that most school board members believe physical activity positively impacts student fitness levels and academic performance.<sup>7</sup> Across California, school leaders are creating greater opportunities for students to improve their health and learning through well-implemented physical education and physical activity in schools.

### Spotlight on success

The Central Valley's [Sanger Unified School District](#) has made physical education and physical activity a priority, keeping students active and ready to learn. All of Sanger's elementary school students engage in 210 minutes of physical education every 10 school days, in addition to recess. The district's secondary school students engage in 400 minutes of physical activity every 10 school days.

There are signs that the increased physical activity is contributing to improvements in student learning, as well as to better physical health. "If we look at past and current performance on state and district assessments, you notice that when our elementary physical education program began, the performance on assessments went up," said Sanger Unified Physical Education Coordinator Jaime Brown. At Quail Lake Environmental Charter School, teachers had students "power walk" 20 minutes before taking state assessments because school leaders saw that students were more engaged after they walked.

Sanger improved student activity with help from the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's [Healthy Schools Program](#). The Alliance's [Framework of Best Practices](#) for creating a healthier school was a key component of Sanger's

program. Even Sanger Mayor Joshua Mitchell became involved, leading the Mayor's Fitness Challenge. Students in select schools were encouraged to participate in a specific number of minutes of physical activity each day and kept activity calendars that their parents or guardians signed. Students who completed the program received a certificate presented by the mayor. The program was so popular that parents asked to expand it to more schools the following year.

## How school boards can help

Lasting change needs ongoing support at all levels: district buy-in and commitment of resources helps school administrators and staff take the steps needed at the local level to invest in improving physical activity.

There are many ways boards can improve student physical activity in their counties and districts. A few suggestions are to:

- Review physical education and activity policies to identify room for improvement. CSBA's sample board policy and administrative regulation BP/AR 6142.7 – Physical Education and Activity, provide guidance, as does the [Alliance's model wellness policy](#).
- Ask CSBA colleagues in other districts about what physical activity programs and policies have been successful for them.
- Give students opportunities to contribute to physical activity plans.
- Provide professional development opportunities and resources to classroom teachers to help them integrate physical activity into classroom instruction.
- Partner with local entities to promote physical activity. Businesses and organizations may be willing to donate money or equipment to help students become more active.
- Encourage school administrators to:
  - » Open school buildings early and provide physical activity programming with adequate supervision, so students can be active before the start of the school day.
  - » Create [joint use agreements](#) so the community can access a school's indoor and outdoor physical activity facilities during non-school hours.
  - » Start a [walking school bus](#).

» Participate in programs such as the [Billion Mile Race](#), [Marathon Kids](#), or [100 Mile Club](#).

- Contact the Alliance for a Healthier Generation for information on how to integrate physical activity into the school day and grant programs that could help support these goals.
- Encourage schools to join the [Active Schools/Active Minds Initiative](#).

## How the Active Schools/Active Minds Initiative can help your district

To help schools, districts, and county offices of education increase physical activity, the Alliance for a Healthier Generation created the Active Schools/Active Minds Initiative. Participating schools receive free guidance, technical assistance, and training so they can improve physical education and physical activity in their schools. The Alliance's online assessment and action plan tools provide a customized roadmap for schools to increase opportunities for physical activity. The roadmaps are flexible enough to adapt to changing needs throughout the school year.

This year, as part of Active Schools/Active Minds, the Alliance is challenging participating schools to keep students physically active for 60 minutes every school day, including activity before, during, and after school. They suggest a  $10+20+30=60$  equation. In elementary schools, 10 minutes of physical activity breaks, 20 minutes of recess, and 30 minutes of physical education are recommended. For middle and high school, the equation changes to  $20+40=60$ . That's 20 minutes of physical activity breaks and 40 minutes of physical education.

Schools that meet this goal as part of the Active Schools/Active Minds Initiative can win prizes, such as time with a celebrity athlete. Schools can participate in the Active Schools/Active Minds Initiative and can join the Healthy Schools Program at [healthiergeneration.org/active](http://healthiergeneration.org/active).

## Endnotes

- 1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2010). The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, and Academic Performance. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <http://1.usa.gov/1c6SUSz>
- 2 Carlson JA, Engelberg JK, Cain KL, et al. (2015). Implementing Classroom Physical Activity Breaks: Associations with Student Physical Activity and Classroom Behavior. *Preventive Medicine*, 81:67-72.
- 3 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans (2008). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <http://1.usa.gov/1p4RnoJ>
- 4 2011/12 National Survey of Children's Health (2015). Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. <http://bit.ly/1WJ7qDm>
- 5 Geier AB, Foster GD, Womble LG, et al. (2007). The Relationship Between Relative Weight and School Attendance Among Elementary Schoolchildren. *Obesity*, 15(8): 2157–2161.
- 6 State Schools Chief Tom Torlakson Announces Physical Fitness Test Results Show Students Mostly Holding Steady (2015). California Department of Education. <http://bit.ly/1oHzkVC>
- 7 Physical Activity and Physical Education in California Schools: A Survey of District/County Office of Education Perceptions and Practices (2010). California School Boards Association and California Project LEAN. <http://bit.ly/1VEF3Ws>

