

ARTICLE REVIEWED

School-Based Health Promotion Initiative Increases Children's Physical Activity

Cluss, P., Lorigan, D., Kinsky, S., Nikolajski, C., McDermott, A., & Bhatt, K. (2016). School-based health promotion initiative increases children's physical activity. *American Journal of Health Education*, 47(6), 343-354.

THE PROBLEM:

Ever since the *No Child Left Behind Act* was passed in 2001, time spent in physical education and at recess has been cut significantly, by 44% of the nation's school administrators. In order to increase physical activity at school, physical activity interventions have been known to be an effective framework within the school setting.

With the right community champions, school-based initiatives can be carried out successfully, and at minimal cost. Engaging all children in physical activity, regardless of physical capacity, can increase the likelihood of participating in physical activity at home. Thus, school-based physical activity interventions are encouraged for healthier children in today's schools.



Research Summary:

This longitudinal study took place over the course of a 10-year period (2005-2015) and looked at the impact of a school-based physical activity initiative, called the HEALTHY Armstrong (HA) initiative, in the Armstrong School District of northwestern Pennsylvania. A total of six elementary schools were evaluated (3,027 students). The HA initiative included creating wellness activities for all children, regardless of physical capacity, offered a variety of physical activities through web-based portals, and implemented school-wide activity programs (e.g., morning walk programs, fitness trails, turkey trot). "KidMinutes" was used as a measure to calculate the amount of structured physical activity that occurred across groups by multiplying the number of physical activity minutes by the number of times the activity occurred by the number of students that participated.

Conclusion:

In using KidMinutes to measure physical activity behaviors through the implementation of the HA initiative, there was a 293% increase in time spent in physical activity from 2005 to 2015. The percentage of children considered overweight during the study decreased from 19% to 17%. Supportive factors for the success of the HA initiative included: identifying a well-known community champion (who is passionate about childhood obesity); providing compensation for physical education teacher's time dedicated to the success of the school-based project; implementation of a district-wide focus on healthy eating and physical activity; and building professional relationships with researchers from a nearby university.

Key Takeaway:

To increase physical activity behaviors within the school setting, school-based health and physical activity initiatives need to be sought after and implemented. The more well-known the initiative is throughout the community, the more likely students will increase their activity in and out of school. For certified health education specialists, the promotion of individual and community health aligns with Areas of Responsibility II, III, IV and VI.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [Using the Whole School. Whole Community. Whole Child Model To Ensure Student Health and Academic Success](#) - a framework for collaboration to improve student learning and health in schools.

School-Based Structured Physical Activity Ideas:

- **Morning announcement exercises:** Exercise, individually or as a class, following the announcements for a total of three minutes. This exercise time is accompanied by music being played from the school PA system.
- **Morning Walk Program:** If students get to school early, they are corralled into the gym and encouraged to walk around the perimeter of the gym up until five minutes before morning announcements.
- **...Pumpkin Run, Turkey Trot, Joy Joy Jog, and Shamrock Shuffle:** Walking time is penciled into the school day for a total of 30-40 minutes. Entire buildings or departments will go outside during this time and walk around with their classes.
- **Easter Eggs-ercise Hunt:** Easter eggs are scattered around school with pieces of paper inside of them. Each piece of paper has a different exercise on it. As soon as students are done completing an exercise, they move on to another exercise egg. This activity lasts anywhere from 30-35 minutes.
- **The Great Apple Crunch:** Station activities including apple themes, such as, hot apple (version of hot potato) and apple sack relays.
- **StoryWalk Fitness:** Reading is incorporated with physical activity to some capacity.
- **Fitness as a Reward:** Fitness activities are offered as rewards for good classroom behavior, instead of junk food.