

Schools in Suburban Chicago Work to Make Physical Education Count

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At A Glance

As of June 2016, 28,467 K-12 students in suburban Cook County, Illinois, have access to enhanced physical education (PE). The Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH) and several partners trained local PE teachers, administrators, and school wellness councils to set up policies and practices supporting enhanced PE instruction. Following the training, students spend 23% (about 10 minutes) more class time doing in moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA).



Public Health Challenge

In suburban Cook County, obesity rates are 40% higher for kindergartners and nearly 25% higher for 9th grade students, compared to national rates. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), children and adolescents who have obesity are more likely to have obesity as adults and to face health problems such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, and several types of cancer. Healthy eating and regular physical activity can help

lower the risk of obesity. Yet, 3 in 4 high school students in suburban Cook County do not get the minimum recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity. In 2014, Illinois adopted enhanced PE standards to lower childhood obesity rates and improve physical activity opportunities for all students. Enhanced PE involves making PE classes longer or maximizing time spent in MVPA during PE classes.

Find Out More

This project is supported by CDC's Partnerships to Improve Community Health cooperative agreement. Schools can help students succeed in school and improve health through enhanced PE. Enhanced PE materials and activities are age-appropriate, sensitive to all skill levels, and keep students active for most of class time. For more information about enhanced PE and to find examples of healthy, active schools in suburban Cook County, visit www.healthychotspot.org.

Kids who are more active are healthier. Healthier students are better prepared for class, and when they are better prepared, they learn better.
- Jim Calabrese, Principal,
Freedom Middle School

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Approach

To support these changes, CCDPH worked with several local groups through Healthy HotSpot, a program aimed at making communities healthier in suburban Cook County. With CDC funding, partners raised awareness about the revised Illinois PE standards, improved the knowledge and skills of 321 PE teachers to enhance PE programs, and connected schools with resources. They also educated school staff on the academic benefits of regular physical activity, which can include better concentration and classroom behavior. Key partners were the three Intermediate Service Centers, which serve as a link between the Illinois State Board of Education and more than 140 local school districts.

Results

From October 2015 to September 2016, CCDPH and its partners organized four Healthy Schools Summits, 17 enhanced PE trainings for PE teachers, and two workshops for administrators. Overall, after the interventions, the average amount of time students spent in MVPA during PE increased by 23%. In a typical 45-minute PE class, that's an additional 10 minutes of MVPA. The number of schools where students spent at least 50% of class time in MVPA rose from 33% to 68%. In addition, by focusing 10% of class time on fitness, skill practice, or game play, teachers increased MVPA during class time by 4%. A 10% increase in teachers' verbal physical activity promotion (e.g., "Let's go! Come on, hustle!" or "Keep going, good job!") was associated with a 3% increase in MVPA during PE class time.

What's Next

CCDPH and partners will continue to provide trainings, professional development, and customized support to schools across suburban Cook County that want to offer enhanced PE programs. This support includes providing resources for fitness testing. Fitness testing is a requirement of all Illinois K-12 public schools that can help students know their fitness levels and set their own goals for improvement. Gathering this information also helps schools to better understand their students' health needs and encourages improvements in school PE programs.