

Nurturing Students Academic Success with Quality Physical Education

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At A Glance

The Seattle Public Schools (SPS) prioritizes regular, quality physical activity for nearly 50,000 students and requires qualified physical education teachers. Using information gathered by the SPS Wellness Task Force, the district committed to including physical education as part of the core curriculum. The collaborative efforts by parents, teachers, community members, district employees, and affiliate organizations mean health and wellness are now essential components of the school environment.



Public Health Challenge

Only 8 of the 95 schools in the district met the state guideline of 100 minutes of physical activity per week. The University of Washington noted in their WellSTAT Review (2009) that the district was not meeting the guidelines. The review cited the low priority given to physical activity, limited funding, inadequate space, and a lack of qualified teachers as contributing factors. Regular physical activity has

numerous benefits, and physical education in schools is an important opportunity for physical activity, since it reaches most children (JOPERD, 2006). However, not all children in the school district get equal time and opportunity to engage in physical activity. This disparity denies many children the associated health benefits.

Find Out More

Gone are the days when student health was an issue of individual choice. Children represent the future, and improving children's health requires a collective approach. You can start or join a committee that develops initiatives to increase physical activity in the community. Everything starts with an idea, but change comes only when a team of individuals work together to create a healthier environment. This project is supported by CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) cooperative agreement.

...Cutbacks of physical education and recess are ongoing nationwide. That's a big problem, because along with the value of exercise for kids' physical health, there's increasing evidence that exercise makes a big difference academically, too.
- Pooia Tandon, MD, Seattle Children's Center for Child Health, Behavior and Development

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Approach

Forming in January 2014, the SPS Wellness Task Force wanted to address issues pertaining to physical education and physical activity. They created the Physical Education-Physical Activity and Health Education subcommittee. The subcommittee gathered community feedback, state standards, curriculum, and best practices for quality physical education. Subcommittee members included parents of school-aged children, current and retired educators, district employees, and community members. Committee members represent organizations such as Seattle Children's Hospital, Seattle Parks & Recreation, Public Health Seattle & King County, Seattle Indian Health Board, and the Healthy King County Coalition.

Results

After gathering all the information, the subcommittee created example policy changes. After reviewing the examples provided, the SPS Board unanimously implemented changes for all 49,870 students. Improvements included elevating physical education to required core curriculum and requiring that qualified physical education teachers have appropriate certification. Additionally, the entire district must fully comply with state guidelines. Now all 95 schools have access to a program from the Comprehensive School Physical Activity Plan. This program meets the state guideline of 100 minutes of daily physical activity. Program activities include moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity every day and some muscle- and bone-strengthening activity at least three days a week.

What's Next

The Physical Education-Physical Activity and Health Education subcommittee will work to implement the 100-minute physical education mandate. Goals also include increasing allowed recess times so that access to physical activity and play are equal across all schools in the district. Over the next year, the subcommittee will assess gathered school data, draft sample procedures, and support school districts.