



STRATEGIES FOR

Supporting Quality Physical Education and Physical Activity in Schools

Physically active kids are healthier kids.¹ The US Department of Health and Human Services recommends that youth engage in a minimum of 60 minutes of physical activity each day. School districts and schools can implement physical activity programs that maximize opportunities for students to be physically active and help them meet the national recommendation.² During the school day, physical education, recess, and activity breaks give students a chance to be active. Schools can also encourage physical activity outside of school hours by promoting community use of school facilities and walking or biking to school. These policies help students reach the goal of engaging in 60 minutes of physical activity daily.

BACKGROUND

The *Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004*,³ and more recently the *Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010*,⁴ require that school districts have a local school wellness policy (i.e., wellness policy) that includes goals for physical activity (PA).

What Do the Experts Recommend?

In addition to the federal wellness policy requirement, other national organizations, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD), Institute of Medicine, and American Academy of Pediatrics have made recommendations for schools to implement policies and practices that support PA, including requiring physical education (PE), allowing recess, and supporting safe routes to school.⁵⁻¹³



What is this Brief About?

School districts have taken a variety of steps to encourage PE and PA among their students. The following sections highlight areas where policy opportunities exist, as well as areas where policies are well-established relative to PE and PA. This brief summarizes the range of policy actions taken by public school districts, including reports from districts on PE and PA requirements, from the 2011-2012 school year, from the Bridging the Gap (BTG) study. All policies were collected and coded by BTG researchers using a standardized method based on evidence-based guidelines and recommendations from expert organizations and agencies.^{14,15} Complete details about how these data were collected and compiled are available in the companion methods documentation.¹⁶



bridging the gap

Research Informing Policies & Practices
for Healthy Youth

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WHAT ACTIONS HAVE SCHOOL DISTRICTS TAKEN?

Physical Education (PE)

Specific and Required Number of Minutes of PE per Week

AAHPERD recommends that elementary students receive 150 minutes and secondary students receive 225 minutes of PE each week.¹⁷ During the 2011–2012 school year, the BTG study found that (Figure 1)

- More than 70% of district policies did not address time requirements for physical education across grade levels, and very few district policies (less than 5%) met the AAHPERD-recommended time.
- At the elementary school level, 27% of districts *recommended* that schools meet the AAHPERD-recommended time for PE per week, but only 4% of districts *required* schools to meet this guideline. When addressed, district PE time provisions ranged 30–150 minutes per week.
- At the middle school level, 25% of districts *recommended* that schools meet the AAHPERD-recommended time for PE per week, but only 2% of districts *required* schools to meet this guideline. When addressed, district PE time provisions ranged 30–250 minutes per week.
- At the high school level, 18% of districts *recommended* that schools meet the AAHPERD-recommended time for PE per week, but only 2% of districts *required* schools to meet this guideline. When addressed, district PE time provisions ranged 30–225 minutes per week.

Specific and Required High School PE Graduation Requirements

One way to increase PE among high school students is to require a specific number of PE courses, credits, or hours for graduation. During the 2011–2012 school year,

- Only 19% of districts *required* specific PE graduation requirements.
- Nearly 80% of district policies did not include specific PE graduation requirements.

Quality PE Components

A quality PE program can provide students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to be physically active throughout their lives. During the 2011–2012 school year (Figure 2),

- Nearly 61% of district policies *required* PE classes to promote a physically active lifestyle or focus on personal fitness.
- Only 30% of districts *required* licensed or credentialed PE teachers.
- Only 14% of districts *required* ongoing training for PE teachers.
- Only 11% of districts *required* students to spend at least 50% of PE time in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity.
- Less than 10% of districts had policies that *required* safe and adequate equipment and facilities.
- Only 8% of districts *prohibited* PE waivers for participation in interscholastic and intramural sports.

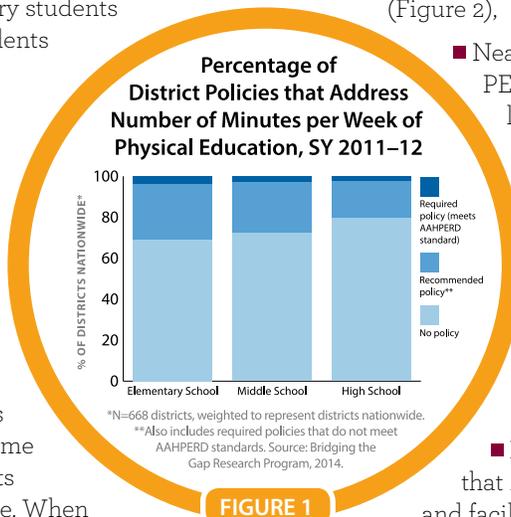


FIGURE 1

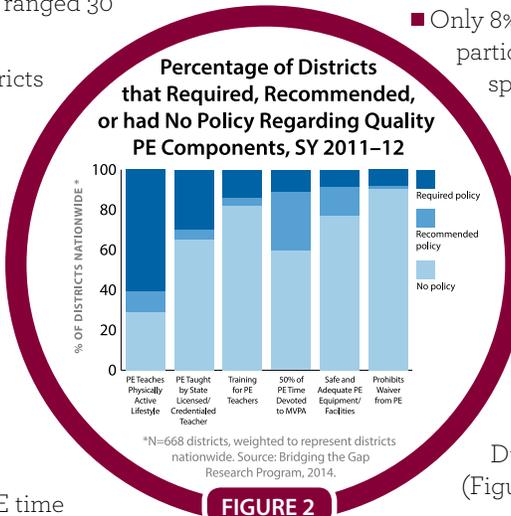


FIGURE 2

Physical Activity (PA)

PA Opportunities During the School Day

To help students meet the national recommendation of 60 minutes daily, schools can provide opportunities for PA during the school day to avoid prolonged periods of inactivity.^{3,18}

During the 2011–2012 school year (Figure 3),

- 89% of districts met the minimum federal wellness policy mandate by specifically including goals for PA in their wellness policies.
- 14% of districts *required*, and 38% *recommended* that PA be integrated throughout the school day (such as through PA breaks in the classroom).
- Only 22% of districts *required* and 18% of districts *recommended* daily recess for elementary school students. An additional 7% of districts *required* and 10% of districts *recommended* recess less than daily for elementary school students.

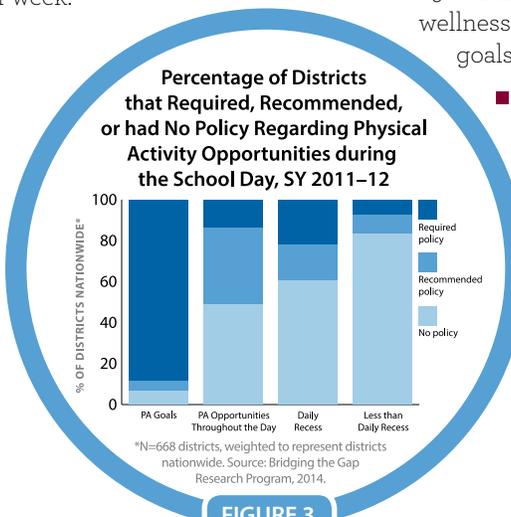


FIGURE 3

WHAT ACTIONS HAVE SCHOOL DISTRICTS TAKEN? (continued)

PA Opportunities Beyond the School Day

School districts can provide PA opportunities beyond the school day (i.e., before or after school, evenings) by using community use and joint use policies and safe routes to school. During the 2011–2012 school year (Figure 4),

- Nearly 30% of district wellness policies *required* or *recommended* community use of school facilities outside of school hours for PA.

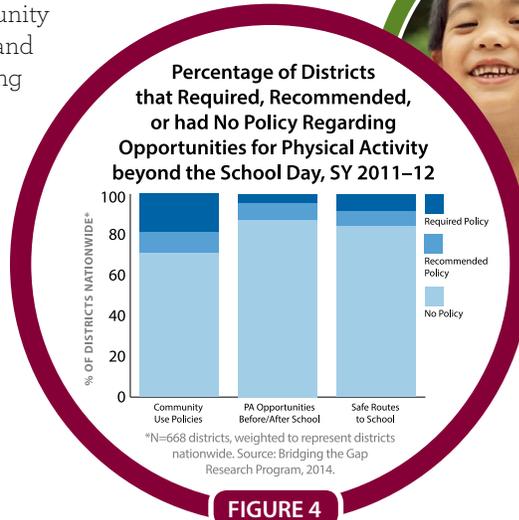


FIGURE 4



- Only 13% of district policies *required* or *recommended* that PA opportunities be provided before or after school through agreements with community agencies (e.g., Parks and Recreation, YMCA, and Boys and Girls Clubs).

- Only 16% of district wellness policies *required* or *recommended* walking or biking to school using safe routes and safe practices.

Supporting the PE and PA Environment

What Can You Do?

There are a number of evidence-based strategies and expert recommendations that can help improve PE and PA in schools.^{3,6-15} The actions below can help you implement these strategies and recommendations. See the Resource section at the end for links to documents and Web sites that provide additional information.

STATES

- Provide districts with professional development and technical assistance for revising district wellness and PE and PA policies.
- Assist districts with monitoring and reporting on the implementation of district wellness policies.
- Partner with key organizations such as the state AAHPERD affiliate and state Action for Healthy Kids team to support the implementation of PE and PA policies and practices.
- Provide professional development opportunities for district PE staff.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

- Create a school health council or wellness committee that includes district and community stakeholders to implement activities that align with wellness policy goals.
- Review and revise the district wellness policy to align with national PE and PA recommendations and assist schools with implementing the policy.
- Involve parents and other stakeholders in reviewing and revising district wellness, PA, and PE policies.
- Require quality PE for all students that aligns with national and state recommendations and standards.
- Prohibit waivers that allow students to be exempted from taking physical education for participation in interscholastic and intramural sports.
- Require that state licensed or credentialed teachers instruct all PE classes.
- Provide ongoing professional development for PE teachers, as well as for other teachers, to incorporate PA as part of non-PE classroom exercises.
- Offer daily recess for elementary school students.
- Work with local public works, zoning boards, and police departments to ensure that students have safe routes to walk and bike to and from school.
- Increase opportunities for children, their families, and the community to be physically active by opening up school facilities, such as gymnasiums, playgrounds, and tracks outside of school hours.
- Form agreements with local governments (e.g., Parks and Recreation) and community agencies (e.g., YMCA) that set terms for shared use of property to enhance physical activity opportunities for students and their families.

RESOURCES

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Adolescent and School Health. Physical Education Curriculum Analysis Tool (PECAT). <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/pecat/index.htm>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs: A Guide for Schools. <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/physicalactivity/cspap.htm>
- American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. National Physical Education Standards. <http://www.shapeamerica.org/standards/pe/>
- American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs: Helping All Students Achieve 60 Minutes of Physical Activity Each Day. <http://www.shapeamerica.org/advocacy/positionstatements/pa/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageid=4726>
- American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. Position Statement: Recess for Elementary School Students. <http://www.shapeamerica.org/advocacy/>



[positionstatements/pa/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageid=4630](http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/resources/wellness-policy-tool)

- Action for Healthy Kids' policy development tool. <http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/resources/wellness-policy-tool>
- US Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans Midcourse Report: Strategies to Increase Physical Activity among Youth. <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/midcourse/pag-mid-course-report-final.pdf>
- Safe Routes. National Center for Safe Routes to School. <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org>
- Let's Move Active Schools. www.letsmoveschools.org
- Bridging the Gap Research. School district wellness policy-related reports and materials. http://www.bridgingthegapresearch.org/research/district_wellness_policies
- Presidential Youth Fitness Program. www.presidentialyouthfitnessprogram.org

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- ⁴ Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-296, § 204, 124 Stat. 3183, 3236-3238 (2010).
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- ⁸ American Academy of Pediatrics. Prevention and Treatment Childhood Overweight and Obesity: Policy Tool. Available at: http://www2.aap.org/obesity/schools_1.html
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- ¹⁴ Institute of Medicine. Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools: Leading the Way toward Healthier Youth. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; 2007.
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