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 School-Based Physical Activity Program. *Strategies: A Journal for Physical and*

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**Comprehensive School-based Physical Activity Program**

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**Overview: What is a Comprehensive School-based Physical Activity Program?**

A Comprehensive School-based Physical Activity Program (CSPAP) represents a commitment to support the health and well-being of students, faculty, staff, and the community. Considering the obesity epidemic alone, one can quickly recognize the need for increased levels of physical activity among youth and adolescents. In addition, increasing one’s physical activity provides multiple benefits including, but not limited to, increased mental concentration, stress management, weight loss or maintenance goals, social interaction, and improvements in physical fitness. Quickly efforts have turned to finding ways to enhance the health and wellness of youth in school, such as a Coordinated School Health Program (CDC, 2004). A CSPAP is a similar approach that specifically focuses on incorporating additional physical activity opportunities for youth within the school day and beyond physical education classes. The goal of a CSPAP is clear—to ensure children at least meet the physical activity recommendation for school-aged youth of 60 minutes or more on most days of the week (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2008).

**The Importance of a Comprehensive School-based Physical Activity Program**

Focusing on physical activity programming is clearly important. When students participate in physical activity and meet national recommendations (i.e., 60 minutes or more each day), they begin to develop habits in their lives that lead to significant health benefits (CDC, 2010). An ideal place for enhancing physical activity in youth is in the schools, since most youth and adolescents regularly attend school. However, due to academic “pressure” and perhaps other constraints (e.g., economy, time, facilities, etc.), physical activity is often neglected. Yet, the obesity epidemic should cause refocused attention on physical activity and wellness. This refocus should occur in local schools and districts but also involve key stakeholders at the state and national levels (e.g., United States Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], AAHPERD, NASPE, etc.). Unfortunately, few school districts fully incorporate physical activity and wellness policies (Action for Healthy Kids Special Report, 2008). Educators cannot rely on physical education alone to meet the daily requirements for physical activity nor assume that students regularly participate in physical activity outside of the school day. Action is clearly needed.

Based on First Lady Michelle Obama’s *Let’s Move!* campaign to challenge the childhood obesity epidemic within a generation (http://www.letsmove.gov/) NASPE proposed the implementation of CSPAPs in a new initiative called *Let’s Move in School*. The goal of this initiative is to ensure that every school provides opportunities for quality physical education and physical activity in order to develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence for youth to be physically active for a lifetime. Beyond the many benefits of a physically active lifestyle (Strong et. al., 2005), research efforts continue to focus on the association between physical activity and academics (CDC, 2010). Quality physical education programs educate youth and adolescents about how to become more physically active throughout school-aged years and why regular physical activity is important as a life choice. CSPAPs provide a significant way to help reach the ultimate goal of physical education—to promote physical activity for a lifetime.

**Comprehensive School-based Physical Activity Program in K-12 Schools**

A CSPAP is a coordinated effort among all school personnel that includes both in- and out-of-school physical activity programming. Several components are included in a CSPAP, with the cornerstone being a quality physical education program. Quality physical education programs should be aligned with National Physical Education Content Standards and provide adequate opportunities for youth to develop the skills, knowledge, confidence, and dispositions to encourage physically active lifestyles (NASPE, 2004). Other components of a CSPAP may include: start the day movement activities; a school walking program; transitioning breaks; physical activity integrated into classroom learning; recess; before-and-after school programs; intramural sports; interscholastic sports; and walk- and bike-to-school programs (NASPE, 2008; Rink, Hall, & Williams, 2010).

In K-12 schools where a commitment to a CSPAP has been made, students can benefit from *start the day movement activities* via school media or a morning assembly in the gym. These activities may be student-, teacher-, or video-led. A *school walking program* can easily be implemented during the school day as well as before or after school. Walking provides an opportunity for both physical and social time. *Transitioning breaks* between subjects in elementary school or to break up long class periods in middle and high school are simple 3-5 minute movement activities that can be done in limited space. Another option is to occasionally *integrate movement into the classroom* content as movement actually enhances learning (Jenson, 2000). *Recess* is a traditional break in elementary schools and should be provided at least once a day. Recess is an unstructured play time that provides opportunities to use motor skills learned in physical education, to practice life skills such as negotiation, cooperation and problem solving (Rink, et al., 2010), or even emphasize playground fitness activities (Carson & Lima, 2008). In elementary schools, classroom teachers can lead students in dances or organized games that provide moderate to vigorous activity. In middle and high schools, off lunch time could include “drop-in” activity sessions that include open gym time, dance, organized games, and current activities of interest (e.g., Pilates, Zumba, yoga, geo-fitness, skate boarding, and physically active videogames). *Before- and after-school programs* such as open gym time, activity clubs and *intramural sports* could be a part of a CSPAP. Each should provide a variety of experiences relevant to and valued by students. While *interscholastic sports* can meet the needs of a few students, other options must be provided for the remainder of the school population.

A CSPAP needs to go beyond the school grounds. A quality program works with the community by communicating activities, sharing facilities, building partnerships, sharing personnel and resources and creating safe walk-or-bike to school routes. Another critical part of the program is to *engage family involvement* by encouraging active lifestyles at home as well as inviting families to schools for activities such as family fitness night or open gym time. *Collaborative efforts with the community* will foster stronger support and partnerships with the K-12 schools. A CSPAP may also extend to *school employees* (i.e., employee wellness programs) as an important strategy for reducing work stress and burnout (Carson, Baumgartner, Matthews, & Tsouloupas, in press; Rink, et al., 2010).

**Application of a Comprehensive School-based Physical Activity Program**

A CSPAP will only succeed with good leadership. It is critical that the school administrator supports the program, appoints a trained physical activity director (usually a certified physical education teacher), establishes a school wellness committee, provides training for teachers, and supports efforts of teacher and student involvement. The school wellness committee should include administrators, the physical activity director, teachers, parents, community members, students, a member of the district school health council, and a community stakeholder with expertise in physical education or physical activity. The committee will be responsible for assessing the school needs, developing and implementing an action plan, building awareness and support for the plan, and monitoring and maintaining the program (Rink, et al., 2010). The success of a CSPAP requires teachers to provide physical activity breaks, share their expertise in before/after school or lunch time activities, agree to not use physical activity removal as punishment, communicate to parents, and promote physically active and healthy lifestyles through bulletin boards, pictures, school newsletters, and electronic media (Hall, Little, & Heidorn, in press). For further information on CSPAPs, readers are referred to several key resources in Table 1.

Table 1.

*Key Resources for Comprehensive School-based Physical Activity Program*

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| Experts (listed in alphabetical order): |
| * Aaron Beighle, Ph.D., University of Kentucky, abeig2@email.uky.edu
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| Selected relevant websites: |
| * *Active & Healthy SchoolsTM classroom activities card set* - http://www.activeandhealthyschools.com/pages/sample.php?id=2
 |
| * *Bienestar/NEEMA* - <http://www.sahrc.org/>
 |
| * *Comprehensive school physical activity programs: Introduction* - http://www.pelinks4u.org/articles/cspap0610.htm
 |
| * *Energizers: Classroom-based physical activities* - http://www.ncpe4me.com/pdf\_files/K-5-Energizers.pdf
 |
| * *Let’s Move in School* -http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/advocacy/letsmoveinschool/cspap.cfm
 |
| * *Take 10!®* - <http://www.take10.net/whatistake10.asp?page=new>
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| Key references (not cited in column): |
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