

# Increasing Students' Physical Activity Levels: Research and a Call to Action

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**Imagine a monthly calendar posted in the lobby of your local school district that is filled with hiking outings, bicycle clubs, lunchtime intramural sports and countless other opportunities for kids of all ages.**

These and other initiatives are taking place around the country in school districts that are championing efforts to provide ample physical activity opportunities for their students. These districts are bucking the trends of kids not getting enough physical activity and rising rates of obesity through creative programming, policies, and community involvement.

To discover what factors help enable school districts to increase the number of physical activity opportunities for children, members of the Physical Activity and Health Innovation Collaborative, an ad hoc activity of the Roundtable on Obesity Solutions, inspired a research study led by Russ Pate, PhD of the University of South Carolina and Christina Economos, PhD, of Tufts University.

The research project described and this publication were inspired by the Physical Activity and Health Innovation Collaborative, an ad hoc activity associated with the Roundtable on Obesity Solutions at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (the National Academies). This publication does not necessarily represent the views of any one organization, the Roundtable, or the National Academies and has not been subjected to the review procedures of, nor is it a report or product of, the National Academies.

The study team interviewed 23 school districts that were nominated for being exemplary in their efforts to provide many opportunities for physical activity during the school day, and found that the following factors were associated with being a stellar school district:

- Establishing a weekly physical education requirement that meets Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommendations
- Providing recess at a recommended level
- Implementing a minimum of 5 different school-based

physical activity programs before, during, and after school to meet IOM recommendations for minutes of school-time physical activity

- Making classroom physical activity breaks the daily norm
- Engaging advocates, or champions, in the district, schools, and in the community
- Being creative with funding—looking for no-and low-cost programs which are often readily available
- Helping facilitate partnerships with physical activity programs and community organizations

Sometimes the right ingredients are present in a community—either by luck or deliberate action—to create an environment that allows for physical activity. Unfortunately, some areas simply make it more difficult for youth to get adequate exercise in their daily routines, such as urban communities with unsafe parks or rural areas that lack sidewalks or bike lanes. That is why deliberate action is often needed to get kids moving and create a culture of health.

Regardless of your position in the community—mayor, teacher, parent, small business owner, or one of countless other integral elements of a community—you can be a champion for the children in your school district. Be creative, get involved, and share your passion for physical activity with the youth in your community. Establishing a culture of health in your school district and your community starts with you. Find out more at: <http://bit.ly/PAICschools>.