

Supporting the Whole Child: Connecting Brain Health, Systems, and Practice

Active Communities and Schools: Thinking through Physical Activity Environments

October 14th, 2026
Session #13



What This Series Is

- An ongoing, twice-monthly learning series
- Grounded in the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) framework
- Interactive and case-based (not just presentations)
- Designed for multiple disciplines and perspectives
- Focused on real-world practice and collaboration
- Creates opportunities to connect with peers, learn from shared experiences, and strengthen support for the workforce

A space to learn, share, and problem-solve together in support of the whole child



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Lifestyles and Nutrition

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Today's Session

Focuses on...

- The fundamentals of physical activity
- The importance of and strategies to create physically active classrooms
- The broader picture around physical activity in schools and communities
- WSCC component(s):
 - Physical Education and Physical Activity



Learning Objectives

1. Define the different types of physical activity
2. Describe the benefits of physical activity to the classroom environment
3. Identify in-classroom strategies for physical activity promotion
4. Describe the facilitators and barriers to active lifestyles in schools and communities more broadly



What is Physical Activity?

Throw some examples in the chat!





Exercise

Planned, structured activity to improve fitness.



Sports & Play

Fun and games that build skills, fitness, and teamwork.



Active Transportation

Moving to get where you need to go.



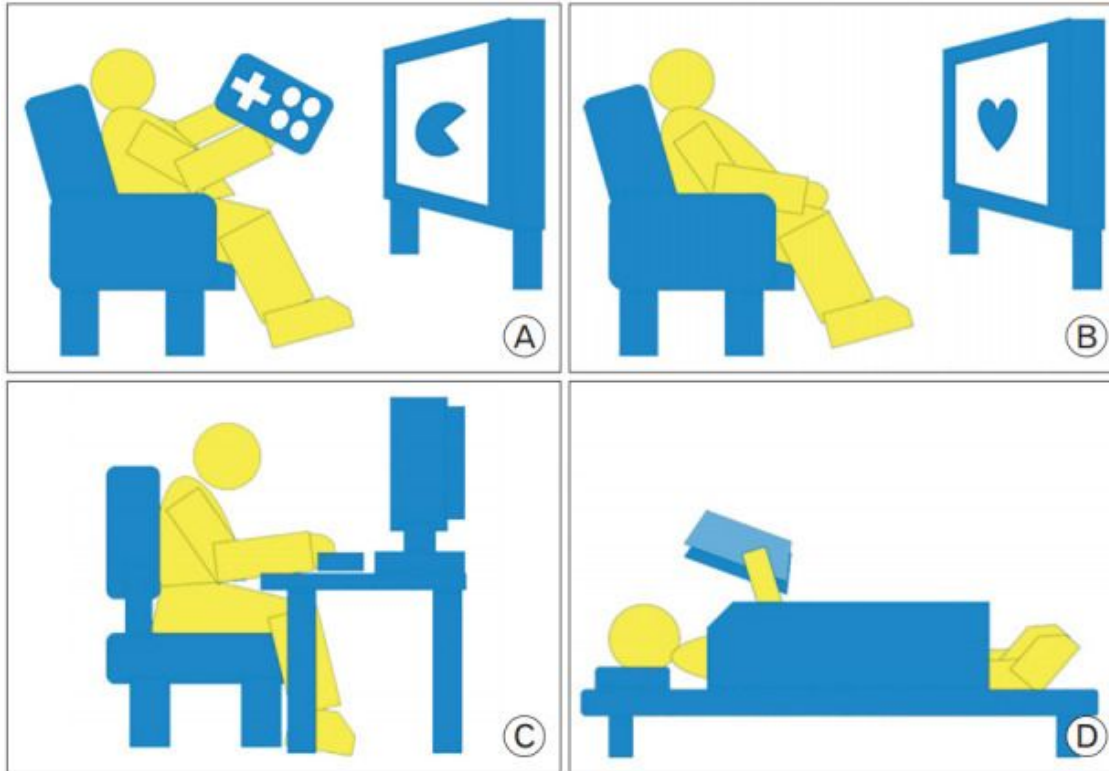
Daily Activities

Everyday movements that keep you and your community running.

**All exercise is physical activity,
but not all physical activity is exercise.**



Distinct from Sedentary behavior...



- Negative health impacts, independent of physical activity
- The goal is to break up sedentary time

Figure from Park et al. 2020



Physical activity benefits|Q

Throw some thoughts in the chat!



General Physical Activity Benefits



- Reduced risks of chronic disease
- Improved metabolic health
- Enhanced bone and muscle strength
- Better sleep
- Improved mood and reduced anxiety



Benefits of School-Based Physical Activity

Regular physical activity in childhood and adolescence is important for promoting lifelong health and well-being and preventing a variety of health conditions. Schools are in a unique position, regardless of learning mode, to help students attain the recommended 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily.

A Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP) can increase physical activity opportunities before, during, and after school.



Increasing youth physical activity:

Before and After School

- Walking or biking to and from school
- Intramural sports and clubs
- Extended day programs

In Physical Education

- Standards-based curricula
- Motor skills development
- Physical fitness

During School

- Classroom physical activity breaks
- Active lessons
- Daily recess

Through Staff Involvement

- Role models for wellness
- Classroom participation
- Professional development programs

With Community Engagement

- Shared use of recreational facilities
- Opportunities for physical activity when school is out of session
- Environments for safe travel to and from school

Benefits everyone:

The Students

- Improved attention*
- Better mood and memory*
- Improved bone health
- Healthier weight
- Better heart health
- Lower risk of depression
- Better grades

The Teachers

- More students on task*
- Improved classroom behaviors*
- Students getting better grades
- Fewer absences

The Community

- Lower health care costs
- Expanded school partnerships
- More access to activity-friendly spaces



*Immediate benefit from a single physical activity session

To learn more, visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity>

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active kids learn better

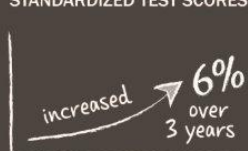


physical activity at school is a win-win for students and teachers

GRADES:



STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES:

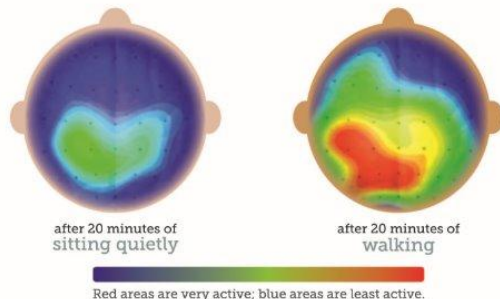


JUST ONE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE LESSON CREATES:



physically active kids have more active brains

BRAIN SCANS OF STUDENTS TAKING A TEST:



MORE RESULTS:

after 20 minutes of physical activity:
students tested better in reading, spelling & math and were more likely to read above their grade level

after being in a physically active afterschool program for 9 months:
memory tasks improved 16%

SOURCES: Donnelly J.E. and Lambourne K. (2011). Classroom-based physical activity, cognition, and academic achievement. *Prev Med.* 52(Suppl 1):S36-S42. Hillman C.H. et al. (2009). The effect of acute treadmill walking on cognitive control and academic achievement in preadolescent children. *Neuroscience.* 159(3):1044-1054. Kamijo K. et al. (2011). The effects of an afterschool physical activity program on working memory in preadolescent children. *Dev Sci.* 14(5):1046-1058. Kibbe D.L. et al. (2011). Ten years of TAKE 10: Integrating physical activity with academic concepts in elementary school classrooms. *Prev Med.* 52(Suppl 1):S43-S50. Nelson M.C. and Gordon-Larson P. (2006). Physical activity and sedentary behavior patterns are associated with selected adolescent health risk behaviors. *Pediatrics.* 117(4): 1281-1290.

Learn more about why active kids learn better and how schools can help at activelivingresearch.org/activeeducationbrief.



**So how much
activity do we
need?**





How much physical activity do kids and teens need?

At least 60 minutes every day.

Most of that time can be **moderate-intensity aerobic activity** — anything that gets their heart beating faster counts.



And at least 3 days a week, encourage them to step it up to **vigorous-intensity aerobic activity**, so they're breathing fast and their heart is pounding.



As part of their daily 60 minutes, kids and teens also need:

Muscle-strengthening activity

at least 3 days a week



Anything that makes their muscles work harder counts — like climbing or swinging on the monkey bars.

Bone-strengthening activity

at least 3 days a week



Bones need pressure to get stronger. Running, jumping, and other weight-bearing activities all count.



Walk. Run. Dance. Play. **What's your move?**

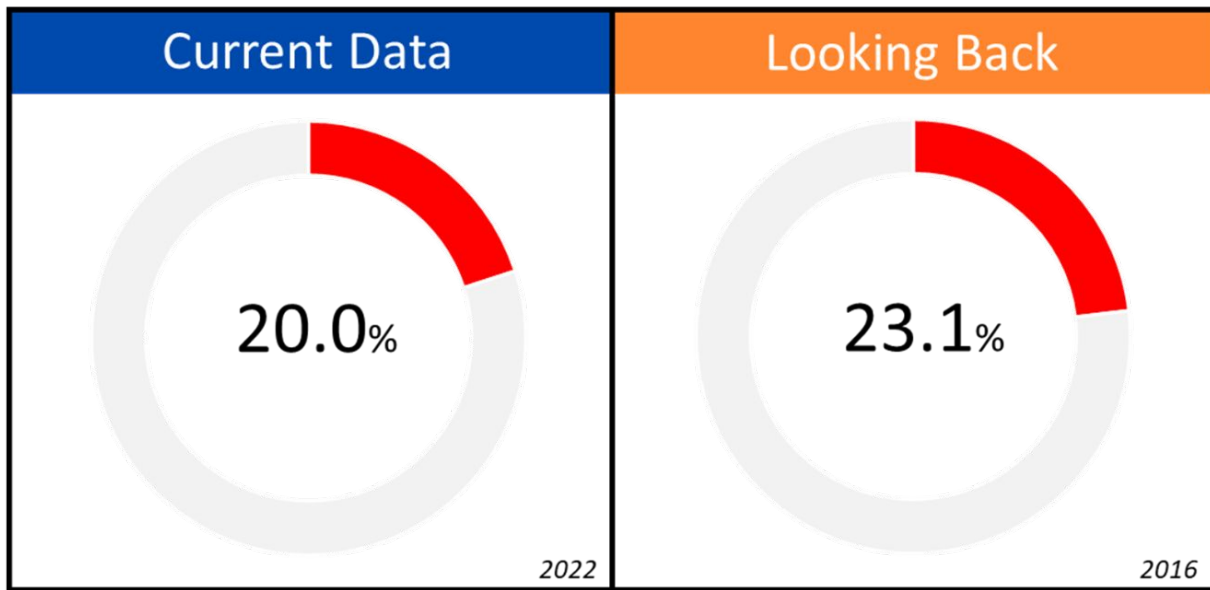


Moderate Intensity	Vigorous Intensity
Walking briskly	Running
Active forms of yoga	Swimming laps
Line dancing	Jumping rope
Cycling (under 10mph)	Kickboxing

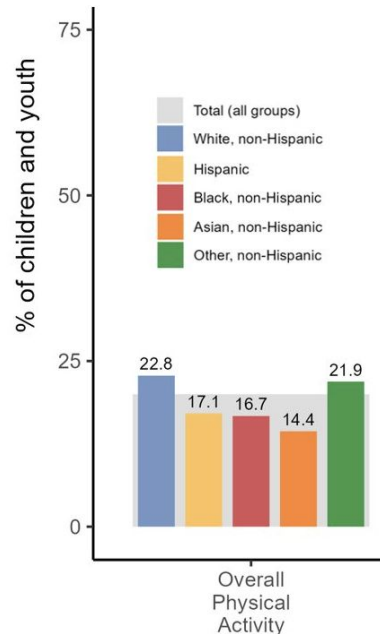




Getting
worse

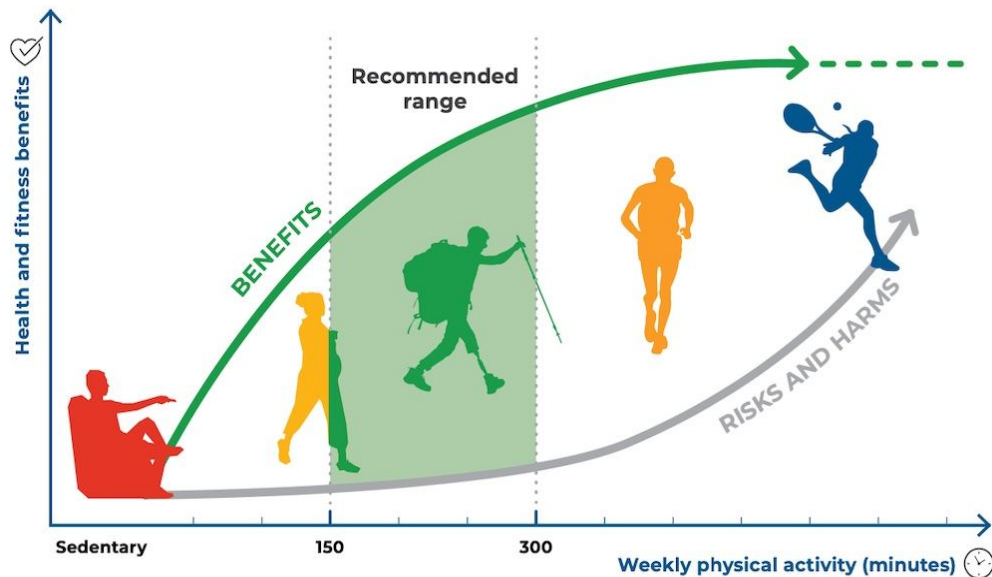


National Survey of Children's Health



But there is a silver lining...

- The greatest health benefits come from **becoming active**
- Short activity breaks and “light” physical activity are beneficial
- **Systems-level approach can benefit everyone**

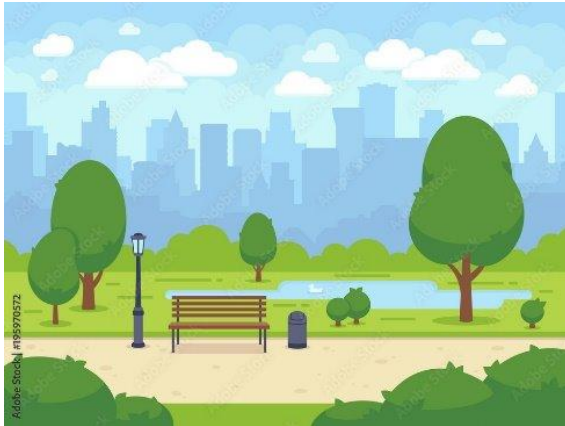


What do I mean by systems?



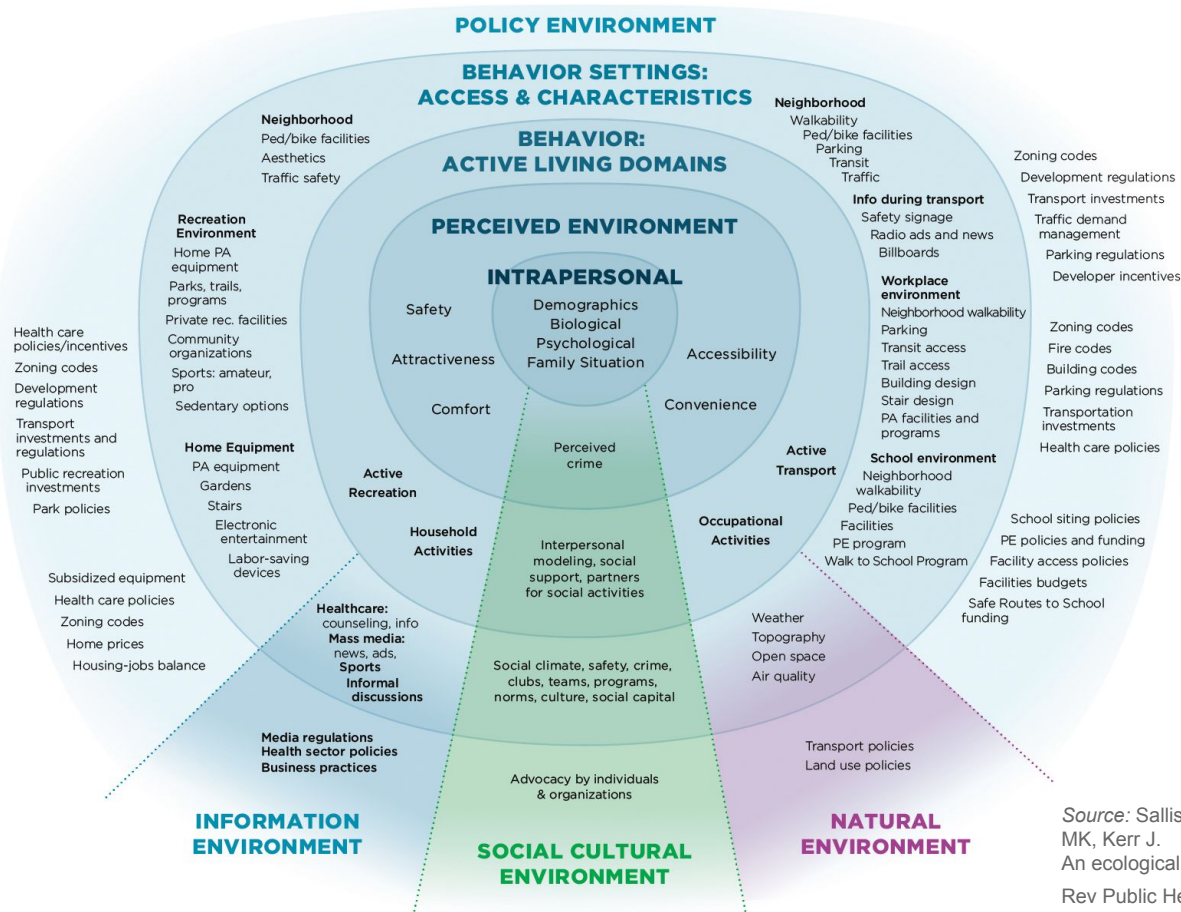
Telehealth ROCKS

Supporting the Whole Child: Connecting Brain Health, Systems, and Practice



Telehealth ROCKS

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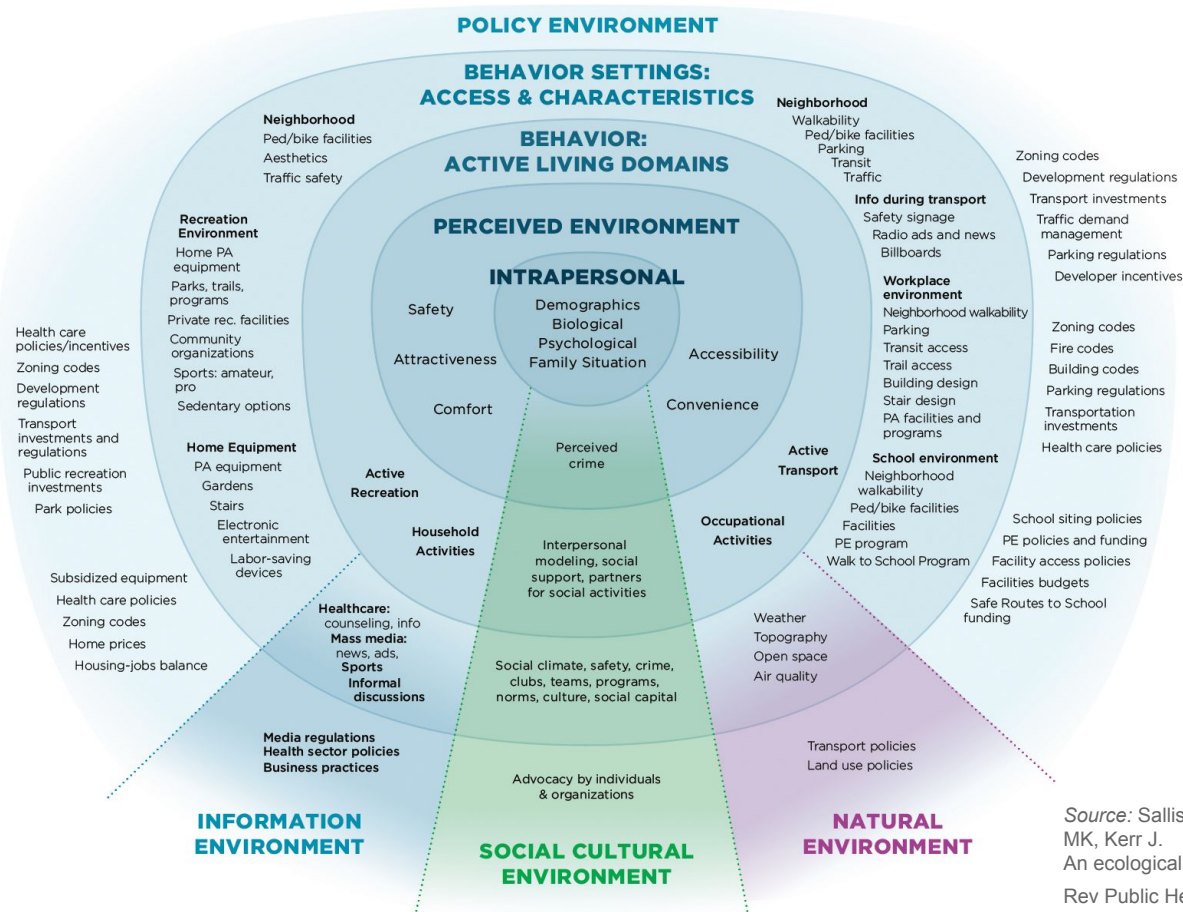


Source: Sallis JF, Cervero RB, Ascher W. Hernderson KA, Kraft MK, Kerr J.
An ecological approach to creating active living communities. *Annu Rev Public Health*. 2006; 27: 297-322.



Telehealth ROCKS

Supporting the Whole Child: Connecting Brain Health, Systems, and Practice



1. Government policies and funding
2. Neighborhood context
3. School policies
4. Policy implementation
5. School culture
6. Intrapersonal characteristics

Source: Sallis JF, Cervero RB, Ascher W, Hernderson KA, Kraft MK, Kerr J.
An ecological approach to creating active living communities. *Annu Rev Public Health*. 2006; 27: 297-322.



ATTENTION
— IDLING —
PARENTS:
YOU ARE
POLLUTING

IDLING A CAR
FOR JUST
5 MINUTES
A DAY CAN EMIT AS MANY AS
25 POUNDS
OF HARMFUL
AIR POLLUTANTS
+ 260 POUNDS
OF **CARBON DIOXIDE**
A YEAR (YUCK!)

SAVE
OUR KIDS'
AIR

DON'T IDLE
WHILE YOU WAIT.

IDLING IS LEAVING YOUR ENGINE
RUNNING WHILE YOUR VEHICLE
IS PARKED, LIKE WHEN YOU'RE
WAITING TO PICKUP THE KIDS
FROM SCHOOL.

EVERY LITTLE BIT COUNTS. INFOGRAPHIC BROUGHT TO YOU BY PICKLEWIX.COM



**BETTER YET, RIDE A BIKE,
RIDE THE BUS, OR WALK!**



Example: School Drop-Off

- Normative behaviors/Culture
 - Perceptions of Safety/Infrastructure Concerns
 - Downstream consequences
-
- How can physical activity be part of the solution?

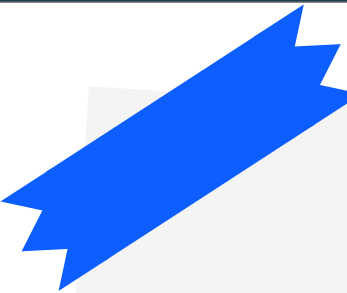




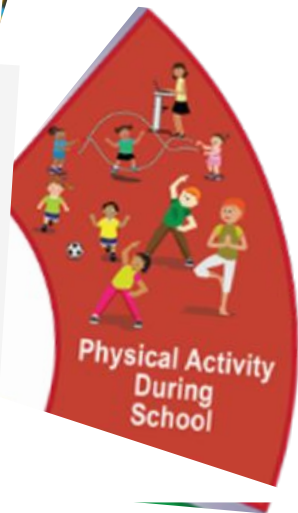
- Behavior modeling and social support
- Environment as physical AND social
 - Access to a playground vs seeing people use it
- The school as a locus of community
 - Physical meeting space & social environment

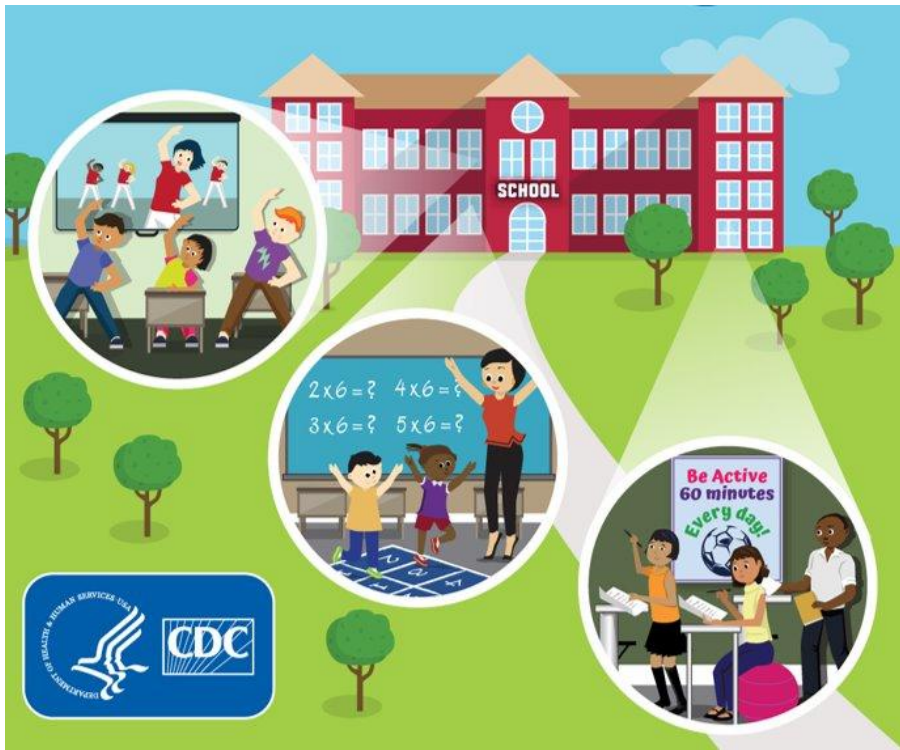






**What can I do
directly in the
classroom?**





Classroom Activity Breaks

- Short physical activity sessions
- Separate from PE and Recess
- Aligned with evolving scientific evidence



What does this actually look like?



Strategies for Classroom Physical Activity in Schools

November 2018



- Integration into planned instruction
 - Energizers for School
- Breaks from instruction
 - Simon says; DPA Toolkit, GoNoodle
- Schoolwide activity during morning announcements



Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention
National Center for Chronic
Disease Prevention and
Health Promotion



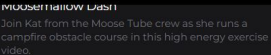
GoNoodle and Daily Physical Activity (DPA) Toolkit

History & Language		General Movement		Math & Science	
low	MODERATE	low	MODERATE	low	MODERATE
VIDEO 1-5 MIN	VIDEO 1-5 MIN	VIDEO 1-5 MIN	VIDEO 1-5 MIN	VIDEO 1-5 MIN	VIDEO 1-5 MIN
VIDEO 5+ MIN	VIDEO 5+ MIN	VIDEO 5+ MIN	VIDEO 5+ MIN	VIDEO 5+ MIN	VIDEO 5+ MIN
POSTER	POSTER	POSTER	POSTER	POSTER	POSTER
ACTIVITY SHEET	ACTIVITY SHEET	ACTIVITY SHEET	ACTIVITY SHEET	ACTIVITY SHEET	ACTIVITY SHEET
					

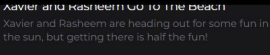
Does anyone have examples of challenges?



GoNoodle
Channels
Activity & Movement
Subjects & Learning
Holidays & Routines
SuperNoodle



MooseTube Dash
Join Kat from the MooseTube crew as she runs a campfire obstacle course in this high energy exercise video.



Henry Danger: Help Our Heroes!
Xavier and Rasheem are heading out for some fun in the sun, but getting there is half the fun!



Danger Force!
Run, jump, and collect 37 gumballs so you can join Captain Man and Schwoz on the force - the Danger Force!



Not Dog Time Machine
Run, jump, duck & dodge obstacles with Not Dog as she goes back in time to stop her 3rd grade self from making a messy mistake!



Henry Danger: Help Our Heroes!
Run, Jump, Duck and Dodge obstacles to help Kid Danger, Captain Man, and Charlotte defeat Dr. Minyak!



Yes! I Want to Build a Snowman
Get moving with Kat from Moose Tube as you jump, duck and dodge your way through a wintertime obstacle course!



Raise the Roof: The Loud House
Bump volleyballs, swat away bees, and chop gigantic pickles so you can watch a new clip of the Loud House on Nickelodeon.



Rise of the TMNT: Sewer Surprise
Rise up and move along with the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles! Cowabunga!



Awesome Upstander
Run, jump, dodge, and duck through school so you can be an awesome UPSTANDER and stand up to bullying!

Take a Moment to Reflect

- What is one thing from today that you could apply in your own work?
- Is there a resource, strategy, or idea from today that you could share with a colleague?
- Is there someone on your team or in your professional network who might benefit from what you learned today?



Today's Ripple



- Physical activity is good in small bursts
- Physical activity is a community-level factor
- Physical activity is good for school settings



Thank you!



What's Next

Supporting Youth with Disabilities in the Workplace: Strengths, Self- Advocacy, and Success

Join us October 29th at 12 PM CST with Amanda Ramsey
& Monica Koehn

