

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



76% of youth ages 6 to 17 do not get the daily recommended amount of Physical Activity.

## What Does Physical Activity Look Like in a School?

Physical Activity (PA) is a critical component of a healthy school. While the terms PA and Physical Education (PE) are sometimes used interchangeably, there are important distinctions between the two and both have important and interrelated roles in creating a healthy school community. Physical Activity encompasses any bodily movement, ranging from structured activities such as organized sports and fitness, to daily activities such as walking or taking the stairs. Physical Education provides an opportunity for students to develop knowledge, skills, and behaviors for active living and physical fitness. Part of a school offering comprehensive PA includes a robust PE program. Using a planned, sequential K-12 standards based program, schools can integrate PA into the school day.

Physical activity of any type has numerous benefits for overall wellbeing. However, the intensity of activity is an important factor in order to achieve certain health benefits, such as building strong bones and improved cardiovascular fitness. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that students engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous PA per day. Consider these definitions and examples when assessing PA opportunities at your school.

Light PA:	Moderate PA:	Vigorous PA:
Requires standing up and moving around, at a low intensity.	Requires some effort, but it is still relatively feasible to talk while doing the activity.	Requires a large amount of effort, resulting in rapid breathing and increased heart rate.
<b>Examples:</b> engaging in a classroom activity while standing; walking to a locker or down hallways	<b>Examples:</b> walking quickly to catch the bus; bicycling around the neighborhood or park; PE class	<b>Examples:</b> extended running on the playground; playing soccer; PE class



### Risks of Physical Inactivity

Lifetime physical activity habits emerge in childhood and adolescence and influence a student's health later in life as an adult. Decreased physical activity in adulthood is linked to numerous physical, psychological, and social health issues, such as an increased risk of:



stroke



diabetes



anxiety and depression



86% of parents and 94% of principals across the U.S. said it is important to them that their child's school is an active school.

## What Are Benefits of PA?

All students benefit from PA. Therefore, it is important to cultivate an inclusive environment that creates a safe space for students of different abilities and backgrounds to participate in PA. The benefits of PA include:

- Improved concentration, memory, and classroom behavior
- Lower levels of stress and anxiety
- Stronger sense of social connectedness
- Motor skill development
- Reduced risk factors for obesity and other chronic diseases
- Improved standardized test scores



Youth in 23 states are more active than youth living in Colorado.

## What Can Schools Do to Increase PA?

Physical activity opportunities will look different for each school community and should be constructed to complement the unique assets and needs of a school community.

- Design a comprehensive PA program that offers opportunities throughout the school day, including: before school, after school, and during class time.
- Create opportunities for the entire school community, including school staff and families, to participate in PA as a part of events or school PA challenges.
- Establish and maintain clear, consistent, and inclusive policies for PE classes and recess.
- Identify and support the education and training of physical activity champions in your school (e.g. Active Schools).



## BY THE NUMBERS The Disproportionate Effects of Physical Inactivity

When selecting a program or approach to address physical inactivity in your school community use an equity framework that considers the diversity of experiences. The statistics highlighted below are to encourage you to examine your own data to understand how diverse identities and marginalized students are disproportionately impacted by physical inactivity.



Children living in areas that experience a **high-rate of crime** engage in less PA than those living in **low-crime areas**.



Approximately 35% of **high-school boys** but only 18% of **high-school girls** report participating in at least 60 minutes of daily PA.



Children and youth with **one or more disabilities** are less likely to engage in 60 minutes of PA each day.

# Physical Activity and the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model

The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model is designed to guide all school community

stakeholders to collaboratively address health behaviors and create environments that promote health and wellness for students by integrating the ten component areas. Through this interconnected and collaborative approach, the WSCC model aims to support the whole child to be healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and

challenged. For any given health issue at any given school, the resources and involvement of each component area may vary. In regard to this health issue, Physical Environment, Social & Emotional Climate, and Physical Education & Physical Activity may be more involved in increasing PA in schools.

Example strategies for aligning and coordinating physical activity-specific practices across the ten WSCC component areas:

## Community Involvement

- Create a joint use agreement with community partners to provide access to indoor and outdoor PA facilities.
- Provide access to outdoor recreation spaces on school campus outside of school hours.

## Family Engagement

- Host regular PA clubs for parents and children at school (e.g. dance classes, group fitness, run-walk groups/teams).
- Involve families through PA “homework” that encourages movement in the home.
- Create opportunities for PA during school events for adults to model incorporating PA into daily routines.

## Employee Wellness

- Conduct PA challenges and other fitness programs for staff and students.
- Serve as a role model to students by participating in daily PA at school (e.g. classroom brain breaks, recess, schoolwide events).
- Utilize PA incentives offered by health insurance providers (e.g. fitbits, discounted gym memberships, free health screenings).

## Physical Environment

- Apply markings on the playground that encourage children to be active during recess (e.g. hopscotch, squares, walking paths).
- Create infrastructure to support PA opportunities in and around school facilities (e.g. install bike racks to encourage bicycling to school, designate safe routes to school to promote walking to school).
- Ensure students of all abilities and identities can participate by creating

activity spaces that are accessible and inclusive (e.g. gender neutral locker rooms, sensory play options, adaptive equipment).

## Health Education

- Incorporate skills-based lessons and PA in the classroom to teach health literacy content.
- Integrate PA into all classrooms (e.g. brain breaks, morning warm-ups, and scheduled schoolwide PA breaks).
- Teach students strategies to overcome social barriers to PA.

## Physical Education & Physical Activity

- Provide the recommended minutes of PE class with students participating in moderate to vigorous activity for at least 50% of class time (150 minutes for elementary and 225 minutes for middle/high, spread over at least three days per week).
- Enlist PE teacher to provide resources and support classroom teachers on best practices.
- Encourage “walk and talk” breaks, walking meetings, or walking during classroom lessons.

## Nutrition Environment & Services

- Adjust master schedule to allow for recess before lunch.
- Communicate messages about fueling the body with healthy foods for PA and optimal performance.

## Health Services

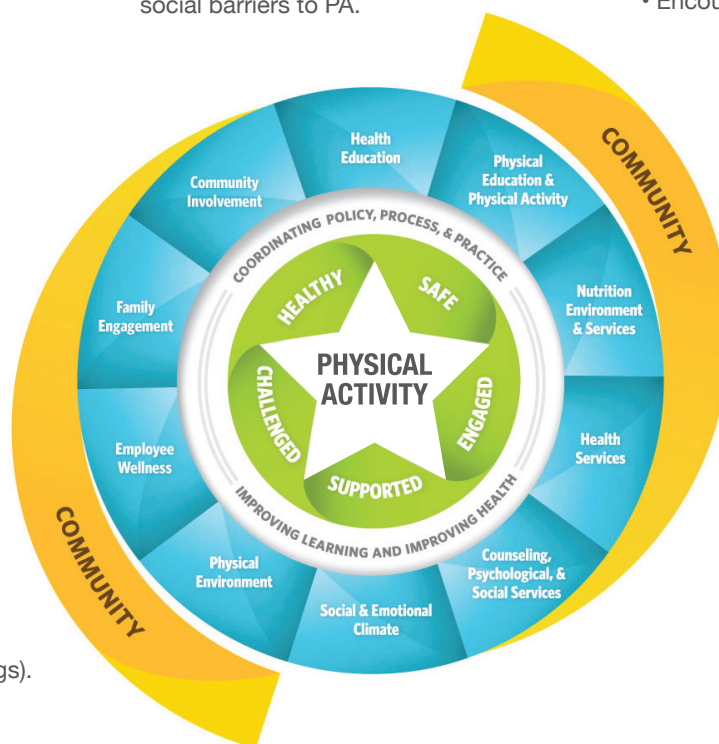
- Involve school health professionals in the promotion of PA programs.
- Support students with special health care needs and chronic health conditions to be physically active (e.g. medication management for students with asthma or diabetes).

## Counseling, Psychological, & Social Services

- Involve school counseling services to support students in overcoming possible barriers to PA participation.
- Provide PA equipment in the counseling office (e.g. jump rope, hula hoop).
- Educate students on the benefits of PA to improve mood and reduce stress.

## Social & Emotional Climate

- Incorporate PA into social-emotional skill building & practice opportunities (e.g. communication, leadership, resilience, problem solving).
- Create gender affirming PE/PA opportunities.
- Provide PA opportunities to support students regulating their emotions.

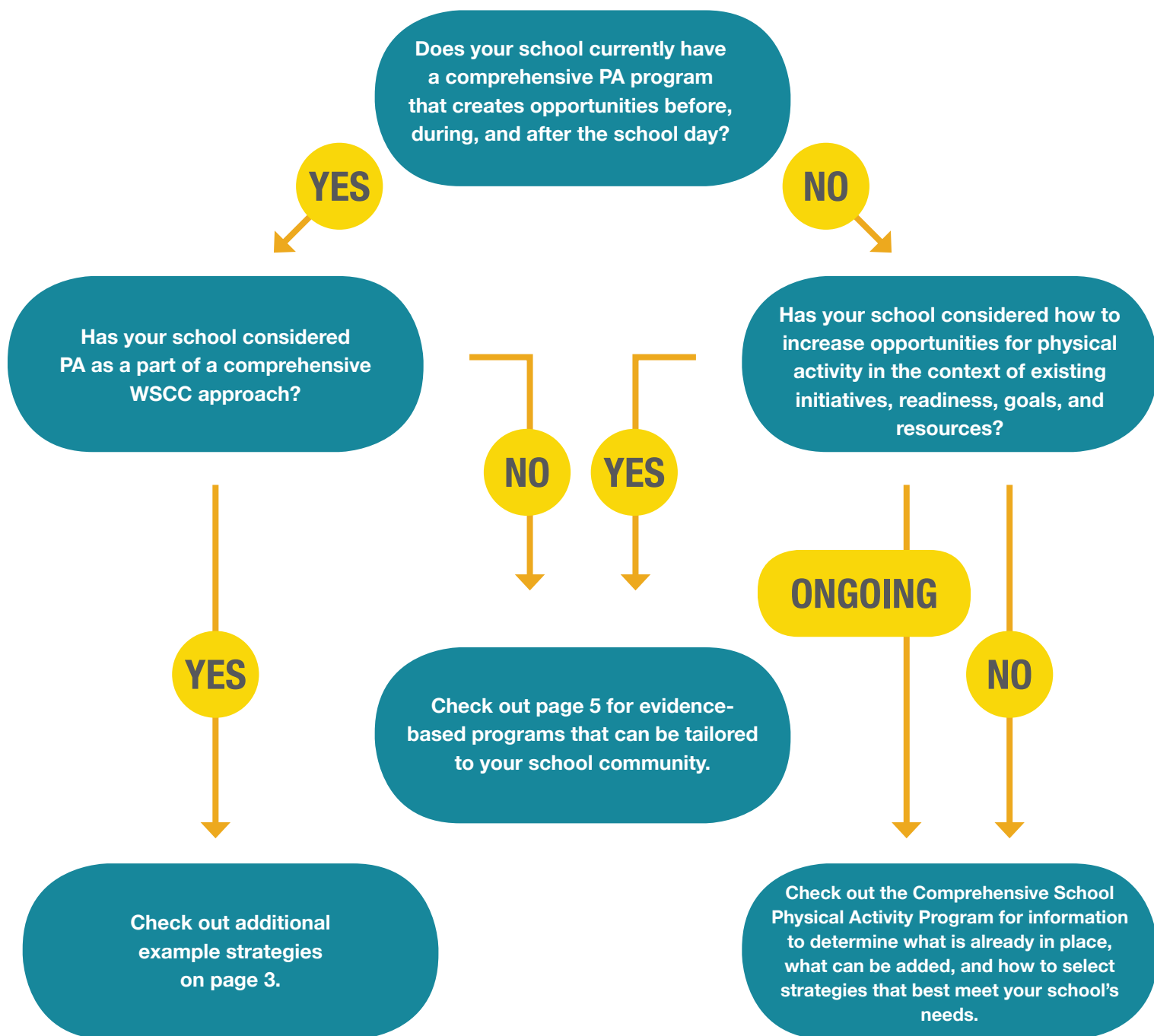




## Next Steps

One of the most effective ways to increase physical activity at your school is to utilize a framework that focuses on physical education and physical activity. When selecting programs for your school, a comprehensive analysis of existing initiatives,

readiness, and aims and goals, is important for embedding effective and sustainable physical activity initiatives into your school. This flow chart will help you get started in planning and organizing physical activity for your school community.



For additional information, including the Menus of Best Practice, visit [HealthySchoolsHub.org](https://HealthySchoolsHub.org).

When considering prevention and intervention strategies, it is important to implement policies and programs that are proven to be effective in school settings. The programs highlighted below are comprehensive, operate at the universal prevention and intervention levels, and are aligned with the WSCC model.

## BOKS:

**GRADES  
K-12**

Build Our Kids' Success (BOKS) is a PA program that aims to get students active and spark an ongoing commitment to fitness and health. This free program provides training, curriculum, and support to school communities seeking to build and maintain PA programs for their students. BOKS utilizes a 12-week curriculum with a daily lesson plan for a 40-45 minute class before or after school. Each lesson concludes with a brief nutritional talk to support healthy eating choices in conjunction with healthy movement.

## Playworks:

**GRADES  
PreK-8**

Playworks is a program grounded in the idea that recess matters and can be utilized in a thoughtful way to improve students' social, emotional and physical health. Playworks collaborates with schools to train staff or provide recess coaches to facilitate healthy recess. Through the program, schools reimagine recess utilizing both old and new games to teach students about collaboration, choice, and leadership.

## SPARK:

**GRADES  
PreK-12**

SPARK programming encourages students to seek out and enjoy PA. It also supports students in the development of physical movement skills and teaches skills for cooperation among students in movement environments. The program offers curriculum for multiple settings in schools, including: PE, classroom instruction time, recess, and before and after school. SPARK offers teacher trainings and content-based equipment.



**The following approaches should be avoided because research indicates they are ineffective, and moreover, can result in a negative association with PA.**

- Using or withholding PA as a form of punishment and/or for behavior management.
- Using fitness testing towards a student's grade in PE class.

The example WSCC aligned strategies (pg. 3), flow chart (pg. 4), and suggested evidence-based programs (pg. 5) are distilled from a comprehensive, systematic, and rigorous review of relevant research. This research compilation and supporting tools are available on [HealthySchoolsHub.org](https://www.healthyschoolshub.org).

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