Ideas to Promote Physical Activity With Your Students

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With declining levels of physical activity and rising numbers of overweight children, what are some general, positive steps the physical educator can take to improve or increase activity levels? After all, increased physical activity is important not only during physical education class time, but also throughout the school day, after school, and over the weekends.

First, you should be aware of a position statement on the need for daily physical activity for children developed by Drs. Robert Pangrazi and Charles Corbin of Arizona State University for the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE). “Physical Activity for Children: A Statement of Guidelines for Children Ages 5-12” (NASPE, 2004) provides the following recommendations:

1. Children should accumulate at least 60 minutes, and up to several hours, of age-appropriate physical activity on all or most days of the week. This daily accumulation should include moderate and vigorous physical activity with the majority of the time being spent in activity that is intermittent in nature.
2. Children should participate in several bouts of physical activity lasting 15 minutes or more each day.
3. Children should participate each day in a variety of age-appropriate physical activities designed to achieve optimal health, wellness, fitness, and performance benefits.
4. Extended periods (periods of two hours or more) of inactivity are discouraged for children, especially during the daytime hours.

To help meet these guidelines, the following are some practical actions physical education teachers can initiate to increase the activity levels of children by engaging them in fun physical activities outside of physical education class. These can be done in or out of school, and many involve whole families.

1. Run a lunchtime or after-school intramural program. Focus on large group activities with high levels of activity. Try some new-interest games such as Eclipse Ball, Ultimate Frisbee, Soccer, Flicker ball, or Team Handball. To effectively introduce these activities, (a) teach the rules of the game; (b) teach the game; (c) have each team designate a captain[s] to represent them; (d) train student officials to help monitor play; (e) create a schedule and list of responsibilities for functions such as setting up the court or field, distributing equipment, and returning it to the P.E. office, etc.

The beginning of each new sport requires some extra teacher time, but the goal is that students will ultimately become self-responsible participants. Therefore, find ways to spread the workload. Create an advantage by utilizing student leaders. It’s also helpful to recruit faculty leaders and playground leaders to assist in the running of the intramural program.
 aides. With everyone working together, the success of an intramural program is ensured.

2. **Organize a lunchtime walking club.** Use the walking club as a means of promoting community. Involve teachers, administrators, playground aides, adult volunteers, parents, and older students, particularly with the younger grades. The community aspect ensures that once the program is off and running, it will perpetuate itself. Design a course (or, perhaps more than one for different abilities or interest) that can easily be completed during lunch recess. Supply tally cards so participants can keep a record of their laps. Award something tangible, such as a plastic shoe incentive to be worn on the shoelaces, to acknowledge a given number laps or miles.

To promote a school-wide effort, use a map to visually display the accumulated miles. A school in Gilbert, Arizona has tallied their miles to the Grand Canyon and a trip from Gilbert to the San Diego Zoo. Select destinations that are reasonable for the way the miles are to be organized. A total school can travel much further than a grade level or individual classrooms.

3. **Establish a weekly or monthly pedometer sign-out for classroom teachers.** Help classroom teachers design specific lessons that integrate pedometers with their classroom content. If the pedometers are placed on each student’s desk, they are ready to be put on first thing in the morning. Students can then record data throughout the day depending on the teacher’s goals. Pedometer data integrates quite well with math, writing, science, and social studies standards.

4. **Allow students to sign out pedometers for a week at a time.** Make a single stipulation that each family member must wear the pedometer for at least one full day. In addition to providing a family recording sheet, ask some probing questions the student must complete before returning the pedometer: Who in your family accumulated the most/least steps? Why? What could your family have done together to accumulate more steps?

5. **Develop a holiday celebration newsletter.** For example, a Thanksgiving Activity letter might provide ideas to develop strength (using vegetable or soups cans) and suggest tasks to perform while watching TV that increase flexibility. Recommend that children share three of their favorite exercises learned in PE for developing abdominal strength. Also, include a lighter calorie version of a favorite holiday recipe. Encourage families to take a neighborhood walk or participate in the local Turkey Trot. Provide incentives for students who return a signed report of what their family did together over the holiday.

6. **Add a “P.E. Corner” to the school’s newsletter.** Alert parents to issues pertaining to children’s health. Short articles are often available or can be summarized from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control), the Surgeon General, or Activity Guidelines for Children. Also, update parents on special activities taking place at school such as Jump Rope for Heart, Track and Field Days, Play Days, and D.E.A.P. days (see #8).

7. **Teach a unit on active playground games.** Arrange with the principal to present active playground games at a school staff meeting. Be sure to include playground aides. Teach everyone how to modify games for increased activity time (e.g., small sided teams). Also, help the playground aides learn conflict resolution methods (e.g., rocks, paper, scissors—the winner wins the conflict and the game is quickly back on track).

8. **Transform DEAR into DEAP.** “Drop Everything and Read” has become universally popular in schools. So, why not “Drop Everything and Play”? As Daryl Siedentop asks, Why can’t we play for the sake of playing? Why does it have to have purpose other than it is fun and active?

9. **Take a look at the COPEC position paper on Recess in the Elementary School Setting.** Does your school meet the COPEC recommendations? What is necessary to convince your school’s administration that providing students with 20 minutes of recess a day is a minimal necessity, not a frill? Likewise,
how might you convince teachers who hold students in from recess as punishment that to do so is really contrary to their purpose? If recess is not provided in addition to regularly scheduled physical education classes, how might you make a convincing case that the purposes of recess and physical education are different? Likewise, how might you make the case that students who sit and are inactive for periods of more than two hours are not only at a long term risk physiologically, but also ill-prepared for cognitive processing and, therefore, need periodic recess?

10. **Assign activity homework on a regular basis.** Base this homework on fitness principles being taught in students’ physical education classes. Introduce them to PALA, the President’s Council log for recording daily accumulated physical activity. Have them write about the importance of each component of fitness and the FITT principle. Or, have them teach their parents some choices for developing the components of fitness. They might teach their family some of their favorite games or new skills from physical education. Whatever they do, there should be a process for reporting it back to class for accountability and to analyze their understanding of physical education concepts.

11. **Organize a P.E. Parent/Participation Night several times throughout the school year.** Focus these evenings on a typical physical education class. Post National Content Standards on the wall and call attention to specific standards to be addressed each evening. Note that of the six standards, two are devoted to the development of fitness. This is a wonderful time to have the parents perform activities with their children. It is also a great time for parents to experience your class management routines. It should not be an evening to work the parents too hard, but simply to share methodologies to which their children are exposed and reinforce the importance of physical activity as a means of improving physical fitness.

12. **Add new fitness routines to physical education classes.** Offer choices that are developmentally appropriate. With elementary aged students, it is important to focus on the process of developing fitness, as opposed to its product (how much each student can do).

13. **Educate classroom teachers.** Organize and conduct a physical activity break workshop for classroom teachers. Make sure they understand this is unique to recess (free choice play) and physical education (skill development). Rather, the purpose of a physical activity break is for classroom teachers to offer a variety of 5-10 minute games and activities that can be used for fitness and to briefly relax overtaxed brains. Classroom teachers are likely to conduct fun, engaging breaks for their students only if they have some idea what they can do. So, the physical educator must select carefully which games, activities, or fitness routines can serve as appropriate classroom breaks, while also considering the classroom teachers’ confidence in their ability to teach and use them. So, the purpose of the workshop is not so much to teach the games, as to instill confidence in the classroom teachers that they are indeed capable of conducting them (and that the time is well spent).

14. **Conduct a physical activity workshop for parents.** Physical education has limited opportunities to help students accumulate physical activity. Parents carry much more of the weight of that responsibility. Outside of traditional team sports (e.g., basketball, softball, football, etc.), many parents are not familiar with activities they can participate in with their children. Holding a quarterly or semi-annual physical activity workshop for parents can empower parents to try new activities at home with their children.

Why not select one or more of these activities as a goal for your professional growth plan next year!? Your staff, your administration, your families, and most important of all, your students will appreciate your efforts.

**Reference**


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