



Promoting Physical Activity Through Physical Education: Increasing Parental Involvement

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Quality physical education promotes lifelong physical activity by teaching students the physical skills and attitudes necessary to be active for a lifetime. One misconception about physical education is that it is confined to the gym walls. Physical educators are beginning to become aware of the importance of promoting physical activity beyond physical education. It follows that physical educators, in addition to maintaining quality programs, might take on a role of *physical activity coordinator* to promote physical activity through both physical education and outreach to the school community.

The obvious purpose of promoting activity in the school community is to motivate children to be active. Interestingly, social support is often identified as an important component of physical activity motivation for children (Weiss, 2000). Support from peers, parents, family, teachers, other significant adults, and even the community are important when attempting to get youth moving. Thus, since physical educators normally promote physical activity and develop ideas to motivate youth, it seems natural to explore and encourage social supports as well. Of the many possible sources of social support for children, parents are the most powerful. And, this remains true regardless of the age. For that

reason, this article provides strategies and ideas for physical education teachers to get parents and other significant adults involved in helping to get children physically active as a lifestyle habit.

PA Calendar/Log

Physical activity calendars are easy to create and help students establish active habits outside physical education. Calendars also serve as a strategy for communicating with parents about physical education, physical activity, and health. Create a monthly physical activity calendar, suggesting both novel and traditional activities children and/or parents can do each day. Base each calendar on either a general monthly theme, such as "Sports of the World," or a weekly theme on something more specific, such as "Dances from Spain." This adds excitement and variety to the calendar, and can also be designed to coincide with classroom learning units.

Give students the calendar and remind them they can either do a suggested activity or come up with their own ideas. Whatever they choose to do, it's important to write it down on the calendar to keep a record of their physical activity. If accountability is a concern and activities are completed at home, have parents sign the calendar as activities are completed. But, for full effect, children should be encouraged to get their parents to do activities **with** them.

It's fun and motivating for children to scan calendars from prior months and track their activity over the course of the year. Unfortunately, parental involvement is quite low in some schools, and children often have very little control over parental involvement despite their (and our) best efforts. Therefore, participation and rewards should not be based heavily on parental involvement. Yet, the calendars are still a valuable way to teach students to track their own physical activity.

Physical activity calendars can also be used to



reinforce concepts such as healthy snacks. Include examples of healthy snacks, such as in Figure 1. Simple facts and important information taught during physical education can be included on the calendar as well as review questions from previous units.

Older students might be given blank calendars or physical activity logs. This gives them the responsibility for thinking of their own activities and tracking them. Keep in mind, they may interpret physical activity in ways that differ from those of the teacher. However, rather than *mark off* for sedentary or inactive items such as "Played Play Station for 2 hours" or "Watched TV," consider how physical activity might be reinforced by providing positive feedback specifically for active items.

Finally, physical activity calendars can be very helpful in getting students active during school breaks. Figure 2 is a sample calendar/log that was sent home during a winter break.

Charity Events

Charity events tend to bring out the best in people. They tend to bring parents to the school and teach students the importance of selfless giving. To make a good thing better, design charity events around physical activity. That is, make the event *active*. *Jump Rope for Heart* is an obvious example. Although it is common to host many such events during the school day, evening events can be very effective, and usually more convenient, in getting parents to the school. When initiating such events, it is important to be patient. Early on, evening events may only attract 4 or 5 children and their parents. However, with persistence, word of mouth, and a few newsletters, attendance will rise. In fact, many teachers find that over time these events require separate schedules for lower elementary and upper elementary students to accommodate all the parents.

A unique idea for a charity event that is active and involves parents is *Chores for Change*. To raise money for physical education, a physical activity club, a local family, or a favorite charity, parents, teachers, and students volunteer to do light chores such as raking leaves, sweeping a sidewalk, picking up sticks, or even washing cars for donations. With effective planning, this event can be a great, active, family event for a good cause.

A Physical Activity Festival is another great way to raise money while keeping participants physically active. Many schools have a tradition of festivals, with proceeds going to a charity or special school fund. It's a relatively simple task to create a festival in which all the events or booths are activity-based.

Newsletters

Newsletters are possibly the most efficient strategy for communicating with parents and getting them

involved. Over the years, classroom teachers have developed effective strategies for ensuring that their newsletters are read. Newsletters serve as a useful tool for telling parents what is being taught in physical education and announcing both upcoming and current events, not to mention opportunities to provide parents with useful information about physical education, physical activity, nutrition, and health. When used effectively, newsletters overcome the difficulty of keeping parents adequately informed and involved.

Fun Days

Plan *Fun Days* early in the school year to create anticipation as school begins or late in the year to celebrate the end of a great school year. The first step in organizing the event is to plan enough activities/stations so there is one station per classroom. (A school with thirty teachers would have thirty stations.) Stations can consist of activities used throughout the year in physical education or other fun activities that are not included in the normal curriculum. Be creative and use all available facilities. Also, incorporate *break* or stations so children can rest and enjoy healthy refreshments.

During the event, rotate classes from station to station with their classroom teacher. To maintain order, it is helpful for the classroom teachers stay with their class at all times. However, that creates another opening for parent involvement.

Quite possibly the most important component of a successful Fun Day is parent participation. Without parent volunteers, Fun Days are virtually impossible to conduct. Assign parents to stations and make them responsible for explaining the activity and overseeing the children with the classroom teacher's assistance. When training the parents, emphasize that the students must be safe, but that their own enthusiasm will tend to make the day much more fun for the children. They really enjoy seeing parents get involved. They also love being outside and showing parents the skills they have learned throughout the year.

As with most other strategies for getting parents involved, Fun Days also provide an opportunity to expose parents to what is being taught in physical education. Many parents are amazed at the skills children have learned in physical education, particularly when a variety of activities are offered. It is not uncommon to hear a parent state during every Fun Day, "I wish we had done this when I was in school."



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Children need at least 60 minutes of activity per day.	2 Jump rope for a total of 10 minutes.	3 Do your favorite up-body challenge as many times as you can (3 x). 2 pieces of celery with peanut butter	4 Play hopscotch with a friend.	5 Learn a new skill like juggling or dribbling between your legs. An apple	6 Play catch with a friend.	7 Just be active for 60 minutes.
8 Children enjoy activity more when they are active with their parents.	9 Play a new game at recess.	10 Start a game of tag in your neighborhood. Whole wheat crackers and cheese	11 Teach someone your favorite stretch.	12 Play basketball for 10 minutes. Carrots	13 How long can you hop without stopping?	14 Be active for at least 60 minutes.
15	16 Teach a family member your favorite abdominal challenge.	17 Dance for 30 minutes. Bananas	18 Invent a game at recess.	19 Learn a new skill. Blueberries	20 Play a new game at recess.	21 Move for a total of one hour.
22	23 Do your favorite fitness challenge.	24 Do extra chores as a favor to your parents. Yogurt and fresh fruit	25 Play a new game at recess.	26 Teach a family member a new game. Frozen Grapes	27 Invent new ways to do jumping jacks.	28 Be active for 60 minutes.

If you want to do an activity other than the suggested activity, GREAT! Be sure to write the new activity on your calendar. Your teacher may use your activity as a suggested activity next month.

How many minutes of activity should you do a day? _____ What types of activities are good for your heart? _____

What does tempo mean? _____ Name three locomotor skills? _____

FIGURE 1 Include examples of both physical activity and healthy eating



What activity did you do the most?
What are your activity goals for the winter break?
What are some examples of activities you could do?

					17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Write down what you do each day over the break!

FIGURE 2 Send home an activity calendar for the holidays.

Fitness Self Testing

Although fitness testing is not often viewed as an opportunity to communicate with parents, by implementing fitness self-testing, it can serve just that purpose. Morgan, Beighle, Pangrazi, & Pangrazi (2004) have provided an in-depth description of the process; but briefly, students assess their own physical fitness level in a station format. To involve parents, send out a newsletter prior to the day of fitness testing, describe the process to parents, explain the value of this unique approach, and suggest potential questions they might ask their children find out what they know about fitness and to stimulate conversation.

PE Nights

Parent nights offer physical education teachers an excellent opportunity to demonstrate activities being taught in physical education. It's also a good time to show parents activities they can do with their children at home. Morgan & Morgan (2004) have provided a

detailed description of how to plan and implement a PE night. The primary purpose of PE nights is to bring parents into the gymnasium and to allow students to show off what they have learned.

In summary, quality physical education promotes lifelong physical activity. One strategy for motivating students to be active is to get parents involved. Activities and events, such as a Physical Activity Calendar, not only serve to increase the physical activity levels of children, but also involve parents, possibly increasing their physical activity levels as well. With some creativity and hard work, physical educators can make parental involvement an integral part of a quality physical education program.

Reference

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