

# INVOLVE FAMILIES IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN SCHOOLS

## Overview

Family members play an integral role in shaping the learning, development, and health of students. The relationship between families and schools reinforces children's health and learning in multiple settings: at home, in schools, in out-of-school time programs, and in the community.

Students who have parents engaged in their school lives are more likely to have<sup>2</sup>:



- Higher grades and test scores
- Better student behavior
- Enhanced social skills
- Healthier behaviors (e.g., more likely to be physically active, not smoke cigarettes, and not drink alcohol)

## Family engagement in relation to physical activity in schools, **defined**:

- Families and school staff work together to increase physical activity opportunities before, during, and after the school day.
- Families work with schools to promote opportunities for physical activities inside and outside of the school building.



## What's happening nationally?

Over 80% of parents believe that children who are physically active are better learners, but their behaviors do not always reflect those beliefs. And as students move from elementary to high school, the level of parent engagement tends to decrease overall.<sup>3</sup>



40% of parents reported communicating with their child's school principal or assistant principal about physical education or physical activity programs during the past school year.<sup>3</sup>



60% of parents indicated that they volunteered for at least one of their child's school physical activity programs during the past school year.<sup>3</sup>

School districts and schools can also do more to commit to engaging families in meaningful ways:



50% of districts provided funding for or offered professional development to physical education teachers on encouraging family involvement in physical activity.<sup>4\*</sup>



During the 2015-16 school year, the percentage of schools that provided families with information about physical activity ranged from 25% to 60% across states.<sup>5</sup>

*\*During the two years before the study.*

# What are ways to improve family engagement?

## Strategies & ideas for families

Below are some strategies and ideas on how families can support and encourage schools to integrate physical activity before, during, and after the school day. Families can:

### Communicate with school staff and other parents

- E-mail or discuss with staff and other parents the importance of daily physical education, recess, and other opportunities for students to be physically active.
- Share classroom physical activity programs, such as *Brain Breaks* and *North Carolina Energizers*, with school administrators and classroom teachers.
- Encourage school administrators to integrate wellness information and physical activity during staff meetings and staff development days.

### Volunteer for school events or in the classroom

- Volunteer to help with organized physical activities (e.g., four-square, active tag) during recess and/or serve as a recess monitor.
- Volunteer to lead a *walking school bus* in the community.

### Reinforce healthy messages and practices children learn at school

- Ask the physical education teacher to provide information about physical activities that can be done with children at home.

### Help make decisions about health in the school

- Join the school or district committee (e.g., wellness committee) that sets the policies for health and wellness, and work to include language about recess, physical education, and physical activity before, during, and after school.

### Be part of community activities supported by the school

- Offer to help with activities, such as the fitness testing in physical education and the annual field/sports day.
- Attend school sporting events and practices.

Visit CDC's [Ideas for Parents](#) for more information and suggestions for how families can get involved in supporting physical education and physical activity in schools.

## Additional resources

The following resources can be used by schools and parents to boost family engagement:



### [Parents for Healthy Schools](#)

A set of resources developed by CDC to help schools and school groups engage parents to create healthy school environments.



### [Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health](#)

A document with a deep dive into more general school health family engagement strategies, developed by CDC.



### [Parents for Healthy Kids](#)

An initiative of Action for Healthy Kids that provides parents/caregivers and parent-led groups with resources to become effective change agents in school and student health.

## SOURCES:

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Increasing Physical Education and Physical Activity: A Framework for Schools*; 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health*; 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Active Schools. *The movement disparity: Parent and principal perspectives on physical activity in schools*; 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *School Health Policies and Practices Study 2016*.

<sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *School Health Profiles: Characteristics of Health Programs Among Secondary Schools 2016*.