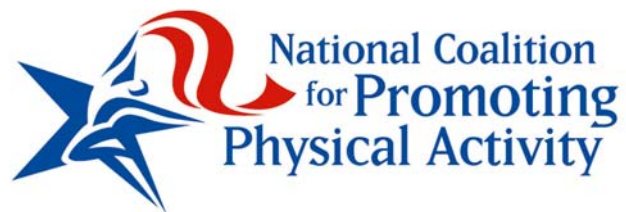


# Physical Activity for Youth Policy Initiative

*Presented by the*



*on behalf of the Physical Activity for Youth Steering Committee.*

# INTRODUCTION

The case for physical activity as a vital part of a healthy America is clear. Regular physical activity helps to control weight, lowers the risk of coronary heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers, contributes to healthy bones, muscles, and joints and reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression.<sup>1</sup> Despite the proven benefits of physical activity, the statistical data on children and their physical activity behaviors reflect a different picture. More than a third of young people in grades 9-12 do not regularly engage in vigorous physical activity. Daily participation in high school physical education classes dropped from 42% in 1991 to 29% in 1999.<sup>2</sup>

The *Physical Activity for Youth Policy Initiative* seeks to provide a means for advocates and policymakers to address the issue of physical inactivity. The Policy Initiative focuses on integrating physical activity awareness and action in four main areas:

- Afterschool Programs
- Community Programs
- Community Design
- School Programs

Within each of these four areas, there are three sections, specifically the Rationale, the Recommended Policy Options, and Policies in Action. The *Rationale* highlights the purpose and reasoning for the focus on each area.

The second section, the *Recommended Policy Options*, provide a means to address the issue as identified in the Rationale section. In determining which policies to recommend, we focused our efforts on strategies that have the potential to reach the greatest number of youth at *all* ability and skill levels as well as policies that ensure that all young people have adequate, appropriate access to physical activity opportunities. Also inherent in the discussion of recommended policies is an understanding that the success of each of these initiatives is highly dependent on adequate funding and resource support.

The final piece in each section, *Policies in Action*, consists of a brief menu of current programs, legislation, or law that was selected to provide a reference point for advocates interested in creating change in their own community. The complete version of the policies in action can be found in *NCPA's Policy Resource Guide*. It should be noted that the policy examples listed in this section are only a sampling of the extensive work and creative approaches currently operating at the grassroots level. Our intent is to continue to add to this section as we are alerted to new policy options and examples.

Success in increasing physical activity rates among youth most likely demands the allocation of more funding and resources. However, policymakers at all levels-Federal, state, and local-are more aware than ever of the critical role of physical activity, and, accordingly, these individuals and institutions have begun to provide the necessary resources and funding to accomplish change. We hope this initiative provides the solid foundation for physical activity advocates to continue this trend, taking efficient and effective action to encourage youth to be physically active.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Physical Activity and Good Nutrition: Essential Elements to Prevent Chronic Diseases and Obesity 2002*.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

**AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS:  
PHYSICALLY ACTIVE AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR EVERY CHILD**

***RATIONALE:***

The time period intervening between the finish of the school day and the family's evening meal, typically 3 to 6 pm, provides a prime opportunity for children to engage in enjoyable, unstructured or structured physical activity. However, this is also a time during which many children engage primarily in sedentary pursuits such as TV watching, video games, and talking on the telephone. Insuring that each child receives at least thirty minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity during the after-school time period would result in a marked increase in the percentage of young people who meet public health physical activity guidelines.

***RECOMMENDED POLICY OPTIONS:***

1. Implement after-school physical activity programs, including school-sponsored sports, that meet the needs and interests of all youth.
2. Provide the appropriate training for volunteer coaches, parents, and other involved adults who are responsible for the delivery of organized youth sports programs.
3. Require state and federally sponsored youth development and early education programs to include opportunities for physical activity.

***POLICIES IN ACTION:***

The following examples demonstrate how policy initiatives regarding after-school programs have worked in action:

**U.S. Department of Education 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC)**

The Department of Education provides grants for 21st Century Community Learning Centers that improve the education, health, social services, cultural, and recreational needs of the community. These centers often host after school or summer programs, for example:

*National City, California*

The school district, community-based organizations, and park and recreation department partnered to offer 21st CCLC activities to youth during after school hours at school sites. A site coordinator and coaches from the park and recreation department are at each school.

**Outdoor Program Funding**

Alabama House Bill 269 makes an appropriation of funds from the Education Trust Fund to the YMCA Camp Cosby in Alpine, Alabama, for the support and maintenance of a program to provide year-round camping, recreation, and outdoor educational services to indigent children.

### **Lottery Funds for Recreation**

For the past 19 years, Colorado Lottery proceeds have been used to enhance quality of life throughout the state. With the help of proceeds raised by the Lottery, thousands of parks, recreation projects, and state facilities have become a reality, including recreational trails, campgrounds, public buildings, and recreation centers. In addition, Lottery proceeds have funded everything from conservation buffers around parks and communities, to open space acquisitions, to the recovery of threatened or endangered species.

### **New Mexico: Use of Tobacco Settlement Funds**

N.M. Stat. Ann 6-4-10 allows an appropriation of the tobacco settlement income fund to include public school programs including extracurricular and after-school programs designed to involve students in athletic activities.

### **Quality Sports Experience**

The National Alliance for Youth Sports in cooperation with the National Recreation and Park Association provides policy recommendations for communities in the planning and operation of their youth sports programs covering key issues such as the appointment of a trained youth sports administrator to oversee children's sports, training of volunteer sports administrators on the proper operation of a program, and behavior codes for parents acting as coaches.

## COMMUNITY PROGRAMS: ACCESS & OUTREACH

### **RATIONALE:**

Community-based youth sport and physically active recreation programs provide children and youth with significant amounts of moderate to vigorous physical activity during after-school, weekend, and summer periods. However, barriers such as lack of transportation and cost prevent many children from participating in these programs. Guaranteeing that every child has access to existing community-based physical activity programs during after-school, weekend, and summer periods will insure that all children can enjoyably engage in regular physical activity.

### **RECOMMENDED POLICY OPTIONS:**

1. Require that federal and state programs targeted to underserved populations and communities incorporate physical activity.
2. Require that summer programs for youth provide daily opportunities for physical activity.
3. Support access to community based physical activity programs by offering transportation options.

### **POLICIES IN ACTION:**

The following examples demonstrate how policy initiatives regarding community-based programs have worked in action:

#### **Community Development Block Grants**

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awards grants to entitlement communities (must be low-income) in urban areas to carry out various development activities including public recreation activities. Each community that receives CDBG funding must develop a Consolidated Plan and an annual action plan; they are then allocated funds based on a formula. Funds are also available for non-entitlement zones through funding to states. For example:

#### *City of Los Angeles Summer Sports Academy*

The City of LA included recreation in their initial proposal for CDBG funding (1996); targeting 99 recreation centers. The total budget for CDBG recreation programs is \$2.7 million. LA Parks and Recreation designed a range of programs to meet the varied interests of youth in different communities. The Summer Sports Academy is a program in which each week (for eight weeks) urban youth are bused to open-space locations and receive top-rate instruction in baseball, soccer, and softball. Mini-Academies are traveling clinics that offer youth opportunities to gain skills in tennis, boxing, and fine arts in their own communities.

**Collaboration: “Movin’ Van”**

In Graham, North Carolina, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the Graham Parks and Recreation Department, and Be Active North Carolina have partnered to provide opportunities for physical activity to underserved children and adolescents. The “Movin’ Van” program targets overweight children ages 9 through 13 who live in Graham public housing. Physical activity specialists travel in a van to bring active recreation, such as equipment for sports and games, to two low-income neighborhoods three times a week during after school hours or in the morning (during the summer). Polar and HealthFirst donated equipment that will be used to gather projected health data to support the need for programs in this area.

**Funds to Participate**

Alabama House Bill 266 appropriates funds by providing funding for participation in a local YMCA swimming program, allowing indigent children to participate in community programs.

**Free Transportation to Physical Activity Opportunities**

The city of Santa Barbara, CA provides free public transportation to individuals visiting city pools.

**Hearts N’ Parks**

Hearts N’ Parks is a national, community-based program supported by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) of the National Institutes of Health and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). The program aims to reduce the growing trend of obesity and the risk of coronary heart disease in the U.S. by encouraging all ages to aim for a healthy weight, follow a heart-healthy eating plan, and engage in regular physical activity. The program is being implemented in fifty magnet cities around the country. For example:

*Kansas City, Missouri*

The Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department launched their Hearts N’ Parks initiative in June with the help of their Mayor, city officials, state Department of Health, and a few hundred kids in summer camp programs. The event was co-sponsored by the local Fox-4 TV station and a popular radio station and featured fun activities for the kids. The Hearts N’ Parks program and news related to the obesity epidemic continue to receive great exposure through regularly aired public service announcements.

**Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program**

The U.S. Department of the Interior provides federal matching assistance to cities and urban counties to rehabilitate existing recreation facilities through the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program.

*Wayne County, MI:*

The primary recreation center for the city of Highland Park, the Ernest F. Ford Recreation Center serves all age groups. Their UPARR project will result in installation of a new roof, shower facilities, and glass throughout. This project will bring much needed recreation to one of the states poorest cities with wide spread drug use, and a high unemployment rate.

**COMMUNITY DESIGN:  
COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS THAT SUPPORT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

***RATIONALE:***

The physical environment strongly affects whether individuals can choose to be active. Sidewalks, bike paths, community recreation facilities, and safe pedestrian crossings are instrumental in encouraging physical activity. A community infrastructure that supports physical activity includes connected, accessible, well-lit, and safe sidewalks, bicycle lanes, crosswalks, and trails linked to destinations of interest to facilitate walking and bicycling; sports and recreation facilities that are close to the homes of most residents, well-maintained, and safe; and programs in place to motivate community members to walk and bicycle.

***RECOMMENDED POLICY OPTIONS:***

1. Implement programs and incentives to create, improve, and promote access to and use of transportation options that enhance physical activity, such as walking and bicycling.
2. Require that zoning regulations support the creation and maintenance of green space and public parks.
3. Provide access to schools and school owned physical activity facilities by students, staff, and community members during non-school hours.
4. Require that public physical activity facilities be fully accessible as delineated in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board.

***POLICIES IN ACTION:***

The following examples demonstrate how policy initiatives regarding community design/environment have worked in action:

**Oregon Bike Bill**

The Oregon Bike Bill became law 31 years ago. At the time, the law was the first of its kind to assist communities in becoming more bicycle and pedestrian friendly. The law requires the inclusion of sidewalks and/or bike facilities any time a road or highway is built or rebuilt.

**The Matthew Brown Act: Texas Safe Routes to School**

The Matthew Brown Act became law in 2001. The Act includes the Safe Routes to School program, which is designed to create safe ways for children to reach school. The program adds new crosswalks, trails, and bike lanes to the existing infrastructure as well as promoting traffic calming measures.

**California Safe Routes to School**

Section 2333.5 of the California Code establishes a Safe Routes to School construction program and includes local grant programs designed to fund construction projects to eliminate pedestrian and bicycle hazards and identify safe walking and bicycling routes.

### **Use of School Facilities**

The state of Massachusetts (General Laws, Chapter 71, Section 71) permits the use of school property by individuals and associations for “educational, recreational, social, civic, philanthropic and like purposes deemed in the interest in the interest of the community.” A separate section permits adult physical fitness programs in school gyms any time the facilities are not being used for school purposes.

### **National Program for Playground Safety**

In 1995, the University of Northern Iowa established the National Program for Playground Safety (NPPS) under a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Injury Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. NPPS provides evaluation criteria to use in determining risk of injury on playgrounds.

### **Dirty Dozen: 12 Critical Factors in Playground Safety**

The National Recreation and Park Association, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, and the National Playground Safety Institute collaborated to create a checklist of twelve critical safety factors in playground design, including protective surfacing, equipment spacing, and supervision among others.

### **Critical Land Conservation Committee**

Established by Executive Order of the Utah Governor, the Critical Land Conservation Committee is intended to assist localities and organizations by providing technical assistance, creating an information clearinghouse for land-use and conservation issues, and facilitating the relationship among the multiple jurisdictions and agencies often involved in open-space conservation efforts and decisions.

## **SCHOOL PROGRAMS: QUALITY, DAILY PHYSICAL EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS**

### ***RATIONALE:***

Physical education is at the core of a comprehensive approach to promoting physical activity through schools. Physical education helps students develop the knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes, and confidence needed to be active for life while providing an opportunity for students to be active during the school day. Qualified and appropriately trained physical education teachers are the most essential ingredients of a quality physical education program.

### ***RECOMMENDED POLICY OPTIONS:***

1. Require that every student participate in daily physical education for the entire school year, including students with disabling conditions and those in alternative education programs. Students in the elementary grades shall participate in physical education for at least 150 minutes during each school week, and students in middle schools and high schools shall participate for at least 225 minutes per week.
2. Require that certified physical education teachers teach all physical education courses.
3. Require schools to provide and implement a sequential, developmentally appropriate curriculum in physical education.
4. Require schools to provide daily physical activity breaks for all elementary school students.

### ***POLICIES IN ACTION:***

The following examples demonstrate how policy initiatives regarding school programs have worked in action:

#### **Carol M. White Physical Education for Progress Program (PEP)**

The U.S. Department of Education manages the Carol M. White Physical Education for Progress program. Designed to award grants to local education agencies and community-based organizations to initiate, expand, and improve physical education programs, the PEP program has attracted a great deal of positive attention since its development. Initiated in FY 2001, the PEP program awarded \$5 million to 18 local education agencies. The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (H.R. 1) expanded PEP's potential recipients to include community-based organizations. Congress demonstrated its support for PEP by increasing FY 2002 funding to \$50 million—a tenfold increase over previous levels.

#### **Texas Physical Education Rule**

In March 2002 board meeting, the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) adopted a new rule that requires students in elementary schools to participate in physical activity for a minimum of either 30 minutes daily or 135 minutes weekly.