

EDUCATING THE STUDENT BODY

Taking Physical Education and Physical Activity to School



MYTH: THERE ISN'T ENOUGH TIME IN THE SCHOOL DAY FOR 60 MINUTES OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.

While the school day is often busy, students spend more than half of their waking hours each day in school and commuting to and from school. Offering children even short periods of activity time before school; during the school day through physical education, active lessons, active classroom breaks, recess; and after school can easily add up to the recommended 60 minutes.

MYTH: INTRAMURAL AND INTER-SCHOLASTIC SPORTS GIVE ALL STUDENTS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY TO BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE.

Sports and other athletic programs are a good way for students to be physically active, but many children face barriers to participating. Teams that cut all but the most skilled athletes from the roster, a lack of sports facilities, and small budgets for athletics may leave some students out. Others may not be able to participate due to pay-to-play policies or a lack of transportation to and from team events. Research shows that fewer children and adolescents of low socioeconomic status or of racial and ethnic minority groups participate in sports programs.

MYTH: BREAKS SUCH AS RECESS SHOULD ONLY REWARD STUDENTS WITH HIGH GRADES AND GOOD BEHAVIOR. THEY LESSEN STUDENTS' FOCUS AND ENCOURAGE BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS.

Research shows that when children regularly take recess or activity breaks during class time, they focus better on academic tasks, improve their grades, and behave better in the classroom.

MYTH: IT DOESN'T MATTER WHETHER A GYM TEACHER WAS TRAINED SPECIFICALLY FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION; ANY EDUCATOR CAN TEACH THESE CLASSES.

Physical education class can provide more than half of the physical activity time children need each day, but in order for these classes to provide all children with well-designed activities that are developmentally appropriate, it is important that they be taught by an instructor who has training and certification in teaching physical education.

MYTH: CHILDREN HAVE PLENTY OF TIME OUTSIDE OF THE SCHOOL DAY TO MOVE AND CAN BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE AT HOME.

While children can certainly be active outside of the school environment, research shows that youth are mostly sedentary once they leave school and are not active enough in the home. Because schools are the one place where almost all youth can be found regardless of background, schools can provide equal opportunities for movement to all students.

MYTH: RECESS ISN'T IMPORTANT, ESPECIALLY IF CHILDREN ARE ACTIVE DURING PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSES.

Children can get 40 percent of their recommended daily physical activity during recess, especially when children are provided with a safe environment and equipment that encourages physical activity, and when recess supervisors are trained to motivate students to be active for the full recess period. However, almost half of schools have eliminated or reduced recess in order to free up more time for academics, and children in high-minority, high-poverty, or large urban schools are more likely to have no recess breaks.

MYTH: MOST SCHOOLS CAN'T AFFORD TO PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMS.

While funding can be a barrier for physical activity and physical education programs, options for low-cost physical activity opportunities exist. For example, active classrooms allow teachers to incorporate movement into regular academic lessons and provide physical activity without cost. Another example of a free option is for school officials, teachers, parents, and students to form walking school buses, where one or more volunteer adult chaperones walk (or bike) groups of children to school.