

Developing a School Physical Activity Policy or Guidelines

A physical activity policy considers all aspects of the school such as playgrounds, classroom curriculum, special events, intramurals, sporting events, fun days, student leadership programs, and physical education classes. It may outline:

- Standards for safe physical activity practices which includes the physical and social setting (i.e. certified playground equipment, safe instructions, active games, and schoolyard leadership pals).
- Standards for participation in intramurals (i.e. emphasis is on participation instead of winning).
- Standards for fun days (i.e. school will host one a month)
- Standards for student leadership programs (i.e. students will be involved in all aspects of leadership groups from decision-making to promotion to implementation)
- Standards for quality physical education that may be included in all aspects of the curriculum (i.e. cross curricular lesson plans)
- Standards for promotion of physical activity (i.e. the removal of physical education class will not be used as a form of punishment but instead the placement of a physical education class will be used as a form of reward)
- Standards for partnering with outside agencies to enhance physical activities for students and their families.
- Standards for physical education classes (i.e. in elementary schools students will have 150 minutes of physical education a week that introduces students to a variety of skills, programs, and activities)
- Provision for after school programs that allow children to be active.
- Standards for recreation clubs (i.e. school will encourage the introduction of different clubs such as ski club, outdoor club, etc.)
- Standards for coaching that include physical literacy guidelines for healthy growth and development.
- Detailed plan to ensure that standards are met and who follows up (i.e. administration, student leaders, and school council).

A physical activity policy provides guidelines for dealing with the above issues in schools, helps to create an environment where students, school staff and school councils can practice these standards, and show a commitment to health.

Sample Policy

A healthy school environment is important for growth, development and learning.

We believe that this school has a responsibility to foster and support healthy practices by:

- Providing all teachers with quality training on physical literacy and physical education curriculum.
- Providing physical activity for at least 20 minutes a day for students in your school during class time (as per Ministry of Education requirements), and promotes 60 minutes a day for children and youth. (according to Canada's Guidelines for Physical Activity)
- Enforcing a "no punishment" rule which deems that the removal of physical activity and education will not be done.
- Ensuring alternatives forms of physical activity are introduced to students that allows them to explore activities that they may adopt as a lifelong behaviour.
- Ensuring that all students are involved in the intramural program and that participation, instead of winning, is rewarded.
- Ensuring that partnerships are formed within outside agencies in order to introduce students to physical activity opportunities in the community.
- Ensuring that all students have an opportunity to become part of intramurals, a recreation club or student leadership group that focuses on active living.
- Ensuring that teachers understand the importance of using physical activity as a reward for when their classes do well.
- Ensuring that students are provided with safe environments such as proper equipment, safe playgrounds and opportunities to be active.
- Ensuring that students have access to after school recreational programs that offer physical activity in a non-threatening manner.
- Enforcing the "get active" theme by not allowing students to stay inside during recess finishing their homework but rather have an opportunity to be active during this time.
- Ensuring that students are provided with quality daily physical education that focuses on physical literacy
- Allowing opportunities for school staff to role model physical activity which encourages and motivates students.

The Ontario Public Health Association identified in its archived publication “Making a Difference In Your Community: A Guide For Policy Change” that “Although education and awareness programs can lead to healthier choices, they are usually not sufficient on their own.” The resource identifies that education; awareness and policy used together have the greatest impact.

Guidelines can be generated at the school board or individual school levels. Guideline development is often fuelled by local concerns. Schools can address these concerns while developing their guidelines. Public health personnel often initiate the process and are able to provide direction and supportive expertise. Healthy physical activity guidelines provide a basis for practical application. Benefits include:

To schools:

- Demonstrates a commitment to health and well-being of students.
- Eliminates inconsistencies and confusing messages about physical activity/literacy (e.g. teaching about the importance of being active but using the removal of physical education as a punishment to the students).
- Supports teachers in educating students about the importance of physical activity and physical literacy.

To parents:

- Reinforces the efforts of physically active conscious parents.
- Provides an opportunity for parents to express their concern about the reduction of physical activity at their school.
- Educates parents on how they can help their child become more active before, during and after school (i.e. Active Routes to School).

To students:

- Creates awareness about how physical literacy can be enjoyable.
- Provides a healthy active environment for those with health issues (i.e. allows an opportunity for all students to be active, allows an opportunity for students to practice what has been learned at home).
- Provides consistent messages about physical activity and physical literacy.
- Reinforces physical and health education taught in the classroom.
- Provides supportive environments in which to create a healthy active school environment.
- Demonstrates to students the concern that schools have for their physical and mental well being.

To outside companies and groups

- Communicates that the school (or board) is serious about the health of its students.
- Communicates that the school is willing to partner with other agencies in order to promote physical activity and physical literacy with its school population.
- Ensures a standardized approach that allows for quality community partnerships.

Physical Activity/Physical Literacy Guideline Development Checklist

This checklist is a useful tool in policy planning. Use it to ensure that all issues are dealt with in policy planning.

1.	Physical activity is defined.
2.	Physical education is defined.
3.	Physical literacy is defined.
4.	Recreational opportunities are defined.
5.	Student leadership is defined.
6.	Intramurals are defined.
7.	Students and staff understand definitions.
8.	Physical activity programs and activities are encouraged by the school council and student leadership groups.
9.	All stakeholders participate in policy formation, especially the students.
10.	School fund raising activities (when applicable) follow the physical activity policy and align themselves with health issues (i.e. selling of healthy foods to raise money for intramural programs or schoolyard equipment).
11.	The school curriculum is based on the physical literacy model and is taught in other areas such as language arts, science and technology, etc.
12.	The whole school population adheres to the physical activity/physical literacy policy.
13.	Physical literacy standards are practiced at field trips, sporting events, play days, etc. (i.e. follow the safe physical activity guidelines)
14.	Physical literacy standards and practices are appropriately promoted and advertised.
15.	An intramural program is in place.
15.	All students are aware of and have access to an after school program that promotes physical activity in a non-threatening way.
16.	In-services and/or training are provided for education personnel, parent council members and student leaders.
17.	Policy is widely publicized and communicated.
18.	Policy supports curriculum-based learning.
19.	Policy is enforced by school administration and teachers.

For more information on Physical literacy go to
www.canadiansportforlife.ca/ or www.phecanada.ca/