



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OPPORTUNITIES IN SCHOOL, AFTERSCHOOL, AND EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SETTINGS

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH INCLUDE A RANGE OF POLICY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS SUCH AS PHYSICAL EDUCATION (PE) REQUIREMENTS, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY BREAKS, AND ACTIVE COMMUTING OPTIONS IN SCHOOL, AFTERSCHOOL, AND EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SETTINGS.

MAKE THE CASE:

Why Is This A Health Equity Issue?

The issues below highlight the need for physical activity strategies that advance health equity:

- **Opportunities for Physical Activity Outside of School Are Limited in Many Underserved Communities:** Access to affordable, culturally appropriate physical activity opportunities outside of school time such as gyms, clubs, and recreation facilities is limited in under-resourced communities.^{176,199} Factors such as unsafe recreation areas, lack of open space, violence, perceptions of violence, inadequate walking and biking paths, and dangers from traffic may also play a role in discouraging children from physical activity.
- **Many Institutions Have Limited Resources to Implement Physical Activity Programming:** Even when supportive institutional policies are in place, differential access to resources can make implementing physical activity opportunities a challenge for institutions in low-income communities. Insufficient funding, inadequate or inaccessible recreation facilities and equipment, and lack of qualified staff can decrease the ability of institutions to offer quality programming.^{181,200}
- **Needs Differ Among Children of All Abilities:** Children with disabilities may have some restrictions that limit participation in certain activities. Understanding their ability to access equipment, space, and infrastructure is essential for promoting physical activity.²⁰¹ Additionally, gender and cultural norms and preferences should be considered to ensure the appropriateness of physical activity opportunities.



Design and Implement with Health Equity in Mind

To maximize health impact and advance health equity, consider these factors and others when designing, implementing, and evaluating physical activity strategies:

KEY FACTORS	BARRIERS OR UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES	OPPORTUNITIES TO MAXIMIZE IMPACT
<p>EQUITABLE IMPLEMENTATION & ENFORCEMENT</p> <p>Promote equitable implementation and enforcement of physical activity programs and policies</p>	<p>Even if a policy is in place, under-resourced settings may have difficulty implementing quality physical activity improvements and policies, resulting in children in these settings receiving fewer benefits from the programs and policies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put accountability measures in place to monitor and enforce implementation efforts across settings. Address the needs of under-resourced institutions. Prioritize professional development, continuing education, and training opportunities for staff working in underserved communities. Consider allocating technical and financial resources to under-resourced settings to implement physical activity improvements.
<p>LIMITED RESOURCES (STAFF & INFRASTRUCTURE)</p> <p>Find low-cost and creative ways to incorporate physical activity for all children</p>	<p>Limited staff, space, and facilities may be obstacles to implementing physical activity, particularly in under-resourced settings.²⁰²</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with nearby schools, public health agencies, faith-based organizations, and local businesses to locate funding for activities or leverage alternative sites for physical activity near the school. Combine resources to hire physical education (PE) specialists that rotate to different schools and afterschool programs to provide quality instruction and help train staff. Explore play activities that require minimal equipment or consider integrating physical activity into classroom instruction.
<p>LIMITED CAPACITY</p> <p>Develop creative solutions for small and home-based childcare facilities to prevent undue burden</p>	<p>Home-based childcare facilities are relied on heavily by low-income and single-parent families. These facilities, along with other small childcare facilities, may have limited capacity to adequately implement or may not be included in physical activity program or policy requirements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify small and home-based childcare providers and engage them to help develop feasible physical activity practices in these settings. Understand challenges and provide technical assistance and continuing education programs to build capacity among providers. Promote cost-neutral physical activity strategies and find creative ways to leverage existing resources in these settings.
<p>COMMUNITY AWARENESS & INVOLVEMENT</p> <p>Create meaningful opportunities for parents/guardians to engage in decision making</p>	<p>Lack of parent/guardian engagement may make it difficult for settings to prioritize physical activity or have the voluntary supports to make improvements. Competing responsibilities and language needs may also make it difficult for some parents/guardians to participate in school meetings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage parents/guardians and provide leadership and decision-making opportunities about wellness policies, PE, recess, intramural sports, afterschool programs, and other physical activity-related issues. Schedule school forums at convenient times and provide additional support, such as language interpretation and childcare services to maximize participation. Develop feedback tools such as surveys, so families can provide input outside of formal meetings.

Build the Team: Partnership for Success

Successful efforts to implement physical activity strategies in school, afterschool, and early care and education settings depend on bringing a diverse set of partners to the table early, consistently, and authentically. These partners may include the following:

- Afterschool providers (e.g., Boys and Girls Club, YMCA)
- Childcare centers and provider organizations (e.g., Head Start)
- Childcare licensing agencies
- Community members (of diverse abilities, ages, cultures, gender, income levels, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation)
- Faith-based organizations
- Leaders and community champions from multiple sectors
- Organizations serving populations experiencing health inequities
- Parent-teacher associations and organizations
- Parks and recreation department
- Public health agencies
- School districts, universities, and community colleges
- School district administrators, teachers, and PE specialists
- Social service agencies
- State departments of education, particularly agencies focused on early childhood development
- Youth development organizations



Volunteer Services Increase Physical Activity in Afterschool Programs

California

With the goal of improving health, educational, and social outcomes, Coaching Corps partners with low-resourced schools, community organizations, and institutions of higher learning across California to increase students' access to high-quality sports activities. Coaching Corps works directly with these organizations to improve afterschool programming and coordination among physical education teachers, recess supervisors, and afterschool providers to ensure that each student engages in quality physical activity for at least 60 minutes a day.

A trained and supportive coach can significantly increase the number of students who participate in sports activities. Coaching Corps' previous model provided funds to hire sports coaches for low-resourced afterschool programs. However, once that funding ended, programs were often unable to afford coaches and could no longer provide these opportunities.

Recognizing that this model was unsustainable, Coaching Corps began partnering with local colleges and universities to recruit and train college students as volunteers. Partnerships with these academic institutions enable Coaching Corps to continue providing ongoing free support to low-resourced schools and afterschool programs. At the same time, the student volunteers build leadership and technical skills, establish meaningful relationships with young people, and give back to the community.

Even with limited staffing and fiscal resources, these efforts have been successful in increasing physical activity among underserved children and youth. Working with the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund and generous individual donors, Coaching Corps has placed nearly 2,500 coaches in afterschool programs, reaching nearly 20,000 students since 2005.





Playworks providing opportunities for physical activity and safe meaningful play in the community. Photo courtesy of Playworks Detroit.

Playworks: Using Recess as a Place to Play and Be Active

Detroit, MI

The long winters in Detroit, coupled with the lack of safe places to play, make physical activity during the school day challenging. But Playworks Detroit has turned these challenges into opportunities. A national nonprofit, Playworks partners with low-resource schools in local communities to provide organized recess using games that are highly adaptable, require few resources, and promote positive behavior. In 2010, Playworks Detroit was launched to address the activity needs of local students, and has since served 18,000 students. With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and other local foundations, corporations and individuals, Playworks is able to implement strategies using physical activity and safe meaningful play to improve the well-being of children in the community.

Playworks has found ways to use spaces, from hallways and parking lots to auditoriums and gyms, as places for play. Games that require very few pieces of equipment have come in handy for smaller spaces. For example, Playworks can make games fun and action-packed with as little as a ball, a few hula hoops, and a couple of safety cones.

During recess, Playworks coaches organize stations with games such as tag, four square, and kickball, which can be modified to include students of all abilities. Playworks coaches model positive behavior, and this creates a shared understanding among students. This shared understanding leads to fewer conflicts on the playground and more productive classroom time.

In addition to working in schools, Playworks Detroit plays with the community once a month by partnering with local organizations, the police department, and the mayor's office to host events such as Recess Days. During one Recess Day, Detroit's mayor joined hundreds of students in downtown Detroit as they learned how to play safely while having fun. "Getting kids to be physically active is a good place to start. Then you can begin a conversation on how do we as a community create more safe places to play," says Jeannine Gant, Executive Director of Playworks Detroit. By providing trained coaches, working with a wide variety of partners, and demonstrating that children can play anywhere if they are supported, Playworks Detroit is getting students and the larger Detroit community to play again.