



ANCHOR

ACCELERATING NATIONAL COMMUNITY HEALTH OUTCOMES THROUGH REINFORCING PARTNERSHIPS

PROVIDENCE SCHOOLS AIM TO IMPROVE SCHOOL SUCCESS BY INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



Childhood obesity rates have more than tripled since 1980, and for the past ten years they have remained relatively unchanged. Thirty-two percent of children age 2 to 19 are overweight or obese. Rhode Island is ranked second highest in the nation for the obesity rates among 2- to 4-year-old children from low-income families according to the [“State of Obesity: Better Policies for a Healthier America”](#) report from 2015. Recognizing these alarming statistics, the Providence Public School District and the American Heart Association are working to increase physical activity in the city’s elementary schools. They are helping each school adopt a comprehensive framework that integrates activity before, during, and after school and supports quality physical education programs. The work also engages parents and caregivers, so that entire families and the community begin to build a culture of health.

The Challenge

Severe obesity in childhood is associated with a broad range of health problems, including high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and elevated cholesterol. These chronic health conditions, as well as heart disease and stroke, can follow children into adulthood. Obese children are also more prone to low self-esteem, negative body image, and depression. More than 13 percent of Rhode Island’s 10-to-17-year-olds are obese, according to the most recent “State of Obesity” report. In addition, more than a third of Hispanic high school students reported being obese and overweight, according to the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior survey Results for Rhode Island.



“All students in Providence deserve the opportunity to be healthy and do well in school. A CSPAP approach not only involves students, but it is a terrific way to engage families, staff and community organizations.”

- Jennifer Quigley-Harris, Wellness Coordinator, Providence Public School District

The Solution

An important step in reducing the rates of overweight and obese children is to support strong physical education programs and to increase their physical activity throughout the school day. [The American Heart Association issued a scientific statement in 2006](#) calling on schools “to consider a markedly expanded role” in getting children to be more active.

The work in Providence, RI focuses on schools adopting or enhancing [Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs \(CSPAP\)](#). The program framework, created by the Centers for Disease Control and SHAPE America, integrates the nationally-recommended 60 minutes of activity throughout the day, supports quality physical education programs, and draws in the help and support of families and school staff. The program trains physical activity leaders to champion the efforts in each school.

The Providence Public School District’s Wellness Coordinator, Jennifer Quigley-Harris, hopes CSPAPs will involve more parents and caregivers by having them join the district wellness committee, participate in family physical activity events hosted by schools, and by encouraging their children to be physically active before and after school and on weekends.

Recently, Quigley-Harris talked with a father who stopped every morning at a playground on the way to school. His first-grader was having difficulty sitting still and learning to read. Once active play was a part of each morning, the child’s teacher reported that his concentration and behavior improved. As a result, he was making giant leaps in reading. It’s a real-world example showing the positive effect physical activity can have on a child.

Policy, System and Environmental Change

Once trained, a physical activity leader will have the resources and tools for making sustainable change and shifting the culture to embrace physically active schools as the norm. Physical activity leaders are encouraged to continue collaborating, sharing ideas, and problem solving with others similarly trained across the nation.

Sustaining Success

The American Heart Association, with the support of Providence Public School District, plans to offer Let’s Move Active Schools training led by the Society of Health and Physical Educators this school year. As a result of the training, physical activity leaders will help incorporate 60 minutes a day of physical activity within their schools. In addition, the Providence YMCA and the Providence After School Alliance have agreed to help increase opportunities for before and after school physical activities for students and staff, and to help with coordinating family events focused on physical activity.



Results

The school district has given Quigley-Harris and AHA initial approval for moving ahead with the Let’s Move Active Schools training. Other district employees, the Providence YMCA, and the Providence After School Alliance have expressed a strong interest in family engagement through the creation of a family night with fun physical activities. The American Heart Association is also surveying parents and community members to assess their interest in this issue and getting involved.

Get Involved

Parents can join the movement by participating in events or volunteering to keep kids active during recess, as well as before and after school. The Providence Public School District Wellness Committee always welcomes new members and parents can be trained as physical activity champions for elementary schools.