



ANCHOR

ACCELERATING NATIONAL COMMUNITY HEALTH OUTCOMES THROUGH REINFORCING PARTNERSHIPS

EXERCISE YOUR MIND



Studies have shown that physically active children tend to be more successful academically. Yet, for the children of Central Falls, Rhode Island, it's not always easy to be physically active. Due to financial difficulties, the city's parks and fields are in disrepair, which limits opportunities for kids to be physically active and play freely outdoors. Lack of physical activity has contributed to a rise in childhood obesity rates, negatively impacting the health of many children. With all this in mind, The American Heart Association began working with the Central Falls School Administration to provide teachers with training on ways they can incorporate physical activity between class lessons, or even as a part of their curriculum, to keep elementary students active throughout the school day. Eager to support the dual benefit of improving health and academic performance, administrators jumped at this opportunity.

The Challenge

Rhode Island ranks second highest in the country for obesity among low-income children ages 2- to 4-years old. Recent statistics also show that 12 percent of Rhode Island high school students are obese, and an additional 15 percent are overweight. Obesity can lead to a higher risk of developing other physical problems, including diabetes, elevated cholesterol and high blood pressure. It also can have psychological effects: obese children are more likely to have low self-esteem and depression. A decline in physical activity among children is a major factor in the obesity problem. The American Heart Association recommends that children get at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day, yet statistics show very few meet that recommendation.



“All students and adults can benefit from these routines. Teachers who are apprehensive about disrupting their learning routines will find that it will actually engage the students more!”

– Debra Lough, Central Falls School Department first grade teacher

The Solution

School days provide numerous opportunities for children to become more physically active and learn about ways they can adopt healthy habits that can last a lifetime. Knowing this, the American Heart Association provided a set of training workshops to help teachers learn ways they can incorporate physical activity breaks throughout the day was set up by the American Heart Association's Accelerating National Community Health Outcomes through Reinforcing (ANCHOR) Partnerships campaign. Bobbi Jarvis, a fitness expert and the founder of the program, "Exercise Breaks in the Classroom," led interactive demonstrations of the activities teachers can use with their students throughout the day, during breaks from learning or even integrated into math, science or other lessons. The workshops were offered during professional development days for all teachers in the Central Falls School Department.

Sustaining Success

The success of the in-service workshops built a powerful relationship with the school system and cemented the administration's commitment to working with the American Heart Association on additional opportunities to integrate physical activity into the school day. The ANCHOR team is in discussions with the district's health and wellness committee on potentially revising its wellness policy to include physical activity breaks throughout the day. Implementation of the policy will be supported by a train-the-trainer event for physical education teachers.

The groundwork laid by the ANCHOR Program also opened the door for the American Heart Association's Voices for Healthy Kids initiative to work with school administration officials on how best to implement a comprehensive physical activity program for every campus within the Central Falls School Department. Additionally, ANCHOR's work supported Voices for Healthy Kids in a successful application for funds to support policy for and implementation of student fitness assessments, district-wide.

Policy, System and Environmental Change

The ANCHOR team is working with the district's health and wellness committee to find ways to improve the physical education curriculum by creating additional opportunities for children to become active during school time. It also has recommended the district incorporate requirements for exercise breaks into its wellness policy. Such a revision would create both systemic and environmental changes within the district.

Results

The ANCHOR team successfully set up a series of workshops to show teachers how they can incorporate "exercise breaks" throughout their school day. Participants in the interactive training session tried out routines and learned about best practices for incorporating movement breaks into their schedule. They also were reminded about the benefits that boosting physical activity can have on their students, including increased attention and better behavior. Regular exercise also helps reduce anxiety and depression among children. "Teaching first grade, I thought it would be a great tool to use to keep the students engaged throughout the day," said Central Falls teacher and workshop participant Debra Lough, who noted that it's difficult even for adults to sit still and concentrate for extended periods without breaks. "After taking the class, I am excited to implement it into my daily routines. The children will enjoy the break and it will stimulate and refocus them back to the content area being taught."

Get Involved

To learn more about ANCHOR's work with the Rhode Island communities of Central Falls and Pawtucket, and how their collaboration is boosting physical activity among youth and promoting healthier lives for everyone, visit the website for [Get Healthy Rhode Island](#).

