

WellSpring

Activating Alberta Schools Every Day

Helping Schools Implement Daily Physical Activity (DPA)

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The goal of daily physical activity (DPA) is to increase students' physical activity levels. Schools have been given a great deal of flexibility to find creative ways to provide thirty minutes of daily physical activity for all grades one to nine students. DPA is important for all schools. Healthy students are better able to learn, and supportive environments help students develop positive habits for a healthy, active lifestyle.

To help schools implement DPA, Alberta Education has provided several types of support. For example, every school in Alberta has received a draft of the *Daily Physical Activity School Handbook* (Alberta Education, 2005). The Handbook provides ideas for many types of activities, e.g., in small spaces (such as classrooms and hallways), with large groups of students, or outdoors. The Handbook also includes strategies for administrators to develop a school environment that supports physical activity. Alberta Education has provided grants to develop and deliver professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators. In addition, the Ministry increased its annual base funding to school authorities by \$1.2 million to help deliver DPA.

To assess the implementation of DPA, Alberta Education will gather baseline data on students' physical activity levels and will share promising practices of DPA implementation. While it may be valuable to gather all of the data suggested in the following article, Alberta Education will only measure the effects of outcomes linked to the DPA goals.

Few people will argue with the intent of DPA. The challenge is to provide quality learning experiences for students to motivate them to adopt and lead healthy active lifestyles. Alberta Education believes that Alberta schools are up to the challenge and have already shown a great capacity to increase physical activity habits for students across the province.

For more information and support resources for DPA, visit the following web sites:

- Alberta Education: www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/bySubject/dpa.asp
- Physical Education Online: www.education.gov.ab.ca/physicaleducationonline/teacherresources/toolbox/actskill.asp
- 2005 *SummerActive School Resource Guide*: www.everactive.org/?p=resources
- Alberta Centre for Active Living (school programs/resources section): www.centre4activeliving.ca/resources.cgi?s=j;d=1
- Ever Active Schools: www.everactive.org
- Schools Come Alive: www.schoolscomealive.org/
- Action Schools! BC: www.actionschoolsbc.ca/Content/Home.asp?langid=1



Run, Jump and Throw: Implementing Daily Physical Activity in Alberta Schools

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What is Daily Physical Activity (DPA)

Starting in September 2005, all Alberta students from grades one to nine are to be active for at least 30 minutes a day. Daily physical activity (DPA) aims to increase physical activity levels among students in order to curb increasing rates of obesity and chronic diseases. A physical education class counts towards the 30-minute daily minimum or physical activity can be incorporated throughout the school day and integrated into other subjects.

DPA and daily physical education (DPE) are different concepts. Physical activity is body movement that expends energy, while physical education is a school subject designed to help children and youth develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to participate in active, healthy living.

According to Dr. Graham J. Fishbourne, “Whereas it is very unlikely that you could have meaningful physical education without participation in physical activity, it is quite possible to participate in physical activity without any meaningful education” (Fishbourne & Hickson, 2005). DPA that supplements physical education should still be linked to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes outlined in the program of studies for physical education in Alberta.

How Much Physical Activity Do Children Need?

The Public Health Agency of Canada’s physical activity guides for children and youth (www.paguide.com) recommend a minimum of 90 minutes of physical activity a day. This number can include 30 minutes at home, 30 minutes at school, and 30 minutes in the community.



Research has shown the many benefits of physical activity. Children and youth

- experience increased self-esteem and perceived physical competence, enabling them to cope with mental stress (DeMarco & Sidney, 1989);
- improve their performance in math, reading, memorization, and categorization (Keays & Allison, 1995);
- are more likely to be active during their leisure time if they have participated in a physical education class that day (Dale, Corbin, & Dale, 2000);
- are less likely to smoke or consume alcohol or drugs (Tremblay, Inman, and Willms, 2000).

In addition, reallocating curricular time towards physical education does not negatively impact academic achievement and may in fact improve academic performance (Sallis, et al., 1999; Shephard, 1997).

Questions Raised about DPA

A stakeholder consultation raised some questions about DPA during the consultation process:

- where does the 30 minutes fit within the school day (how will schools implement DPA)?
- with quality learning space for DPA differing widely from school to school, how will we know if DPA works?

How Are Schools Implementing DPA?

One large junior high school provides 55 minutes of daily physical education (DPE) rather than DPA for all of its 600+ students. The school uses all available space, including the gym, stage, newly developed fitness room, lunchroom, and local community amenities. This school schedules time for physical education before all other subjects in order to maximize the use of its space.

An elementary (K–6) school decided to take a little time from every block, including lunch, to create a 30-minute block at the end of the day. Each student has regularly scheduled physical education for 32 minutes three times a week. On days when a class has regularly scheduled physical education, the block at the end of the day is used for reading or study skills. On days the class does not have physical education, the teacher will deliver DPA in a variety of locations around the school.

Another example comes from a middle school (grades 6 to 8). Physical education is scheduled every other day for 51 minutes. On days when physical education is not scheduled, students take part in 30 minutes of DPA around the school. A committee of students decides on activities, and students help to set up and take down equipment.

Overall, schools are finding that DPA is most effective when embedded in the way a school community operates. Schools that implement quality DPA allow healthy lunches only, eliminate pop sales, educate about health and nutrition, and involve the parents and community. According to Veugelers (2005), such schools can see a 59% decrease in overweight children and a 72% reduction in the numbers of obese children.

Physical activity can improve children's performance in math, reading, memorization, and categorization.

Parents and community members are encouraged to be involved in their local school's delivery of DPA. Support can include

- modelling daily physical activity in the home and community;
- introducing new activities to teachers and students;
- providing opportunities for students to stay active outside of school;
- creating community environments that support physical activity.

School communities that have successfully implemented DPA report increased community awareness of physical activity opportunities, more user groups in school facilities after hours, better communication and use of community facilities, and increased sharing of resources.

How Will We Know if DPA Works?

An ongoing evaluation plan is key to the continued successful implementation of DPA. Currently, schools are encouraged to reflect on their implementation plan and record evidence of success (Alberta Education, 2005, pp. 162–163). Alberta Education is also responsible for evaluating this initiative. Ideally, the evaluation will be longitudinal and include the following areas:

- changes in children's activity levels, both in and out of schools;
- quality of the DPA experience and links to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the physical education curriculum;
- best practices and examples of successful implementation;
- the role of a school environment or climate for wellness (comprehensive school health).

An effective evaluation of the DPA initiative will lead to best practices and encourage school communities who are experiencing difficulties. In addition, ongoing research on physical activity for our children and youth will help to create a healthy generation passionate about activity and healthy lifestyle choices.

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Mission Statement of the Alberta Centre for Active Living

Working with practitioners, organizations, and communities to improve the health and quality of life of Albertans through physical activity.

IF YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS OR QUESTIONS, WE'D LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU.

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