Creating a Healthy Elementary School that supports: Physical Activity

Why Encourage Physical Activity at School?
Physical activity has many benefits for the entire school community including students, staff, and parents. Regular physical activity can help students improve their health and do better in school by improving memory, concentration and attention span. It can also help students to have better classroom behavior, have fun with friends, maintain interest in class, and learn new skills. Physical activity helps students to cope with stress and anxiety, feel happier, and improve self-confidence and self-esteem. You can promote physical activity to your entire school community using the healthy school approach.

The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that children and youth aged 5 to 17 years old get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity every day.

Statistics Canada surveys reveal that only 9% of 5 to 17 year olds in Canada meet this target (2012-13 CHMS, Statistics Canada).

### Curriculum, Teaching & Learning

**At the School**
- Offer all teachers the chance to attend workshops/training on physical literacy/physical activity.
- Ensure inclusion in physical activity for students of all abilities/socioeconomic status.

**In the Classroom**
- Include movement/physical activity concepts in all subjects. For ideas visit the “For Schools” tab at durham.ca/physicalactivity.
- Spend more time outside (e.g. outdoor classroom activities).
- Use other spaces and venues when the gym is not available (e.g. stage, hallways, paved areas, nearby parks and fields).
- Arrange gym or field time with other classes to increase active time for more students.
- Use online videos to promote movement during class and recess (e.g. dance videos).
- Promote decreased screen time in class (e.g. computer time).
- Highlight different physical activities/sports to foster understanding about different cultures.

**Student**
- Give students the chance to increase their knowledge and skills in physical literacy.
- Offer a wide range of things to do including throwing, hopping, skipping and running.
- Students learn best by doing. Offer hands-on physical activity options.
- Provide physical activity homework that students can enjoy with family.
- Assign a student project on a Paralympic athlete or sport from another country.
- Offer students the opportunity to learn about Olympic games as well as Paralympic games.

### School & Classroom Leadership

**At the School**
- Implement school wide DPA (e.g. everyone in the school does a similar activity at the same time every day).
- Create a school guideline that supports students of all abilities to be active. For sample guidelines visit the “For Schools” tab at durham.ca/physicalactivity.
- Start a walking (or activity) group at lunch for students and staff.

**In the Classroom**
- Get students up and moving during class time.
- Set a timer and stand up and move or stretch every half hour.
- Get students to stand to answer questions.
- Staff role model positive physical activity behaviour/attitudes.
- Participate in DPA, intramurals, and stretch breaks.
- Share stories of the physical activities students of all abilities enjoy & why (ask for stories of low cost/no cost activities).

**Student**
- Provide opportunities for students of all abilities to evaluate physical activities they participate in and incorporate feedback into planning initiatives that represent school priorities.
- Ask students to lead the class in stretch breaks.
- Provide opportunity for a student voice in planning activities that are reflective of interests of children of all abilities and socioeconomic/cultural backgrounds.
### Student Engagement

**At the School**
- Train student leaders to lead other students to be active at recess, lunch and during DPA. Include all students to ensure that no one is left out.
- Have students, staff and parents sign a physical activity pledge and hang it in the school.

**In the Classroom**
- Involve students in planning activities that they will enjoy and those they can do in groups (e.g. intramurals, walking club).
- Provide students with a range of physical activity choices that appeal to both male/female students (e.g. flag football, floor hockey).
- Include choices that promote ethnic insight (e.g. Scottish Highland or African dance).

**Student**
- Have students lead the planning and implementation of a physical activity initiative within the school (e.g. family fitness night, dance-a-thon, morning announcements, activity day).

### Social & Physical Environments

**At the School**
- Create climate that encourages and values physical activity.
- Use active fundraising options, e.g. skip or dance-a-thon.
- Promote physical activity over the morning announcements, at school assemblies; via school newsletter/website/social media.
- Display physical activity guidelines/messages at school.
- Plan school events that promote being active.
- Promote active transportation (walking/wheeling) to school.
- Organize team sports/intramurals/activity clubs.
- Offer non-sport activities e.g. walking, hiking or dancing.
- Create "no cut" sports leagues within/between schools.

**In the Classroom**
- Use physical activity as a reward not a punishment.
- Let the class have an extra 5 minutes of outdoor activity if they complete their assignment.
- Create posters showing diverse sports and people of all abilities.

**Student**
- Plan and implement physical activity initiatives based on the needs and interests of the school community (e.g. cultural preferences).
- Invite students and parents to suggest which activities they would like at the school during the day and after school.
- Provide playground game equipment identified by students that students can sign-out and use.
- Paint the playground with fluorescent markings and games identified by students.
- Invite local high school/post-secondary students to lead the intramurals and/or physical activity clubs.
- Plan school events that promote being active (e.g. activity day).

### Home, School & Community Partnerships

**At the School**
- Connect with your school’s public health nurse for resources and support with physical activity initiatives.
- Connect parents, caregivers and community members to:
  - Staff open gyms for students during lunch/after school.
- Organize teams from each school to:
  - Lead fitness/sports club (e.g. running club, soccer, yoga).
- Network with other schools to:
  - Organize a non-competitive sports tournament and create teams with a mix of students from each school.
  - Organize a “buddy program” with a high school.
- Connect with local organizations or athletes.
- Make the school a community hub for physical activity by inviting community partners to run programs at the school.
- At family fitness night invite community partners who have low cost/no cost programs available.
- Start a used sports equipment program.
- Create a confidential school inclusion fund – to allow all students to participate in clubs and outings related to sports. Encourage SCC/Parents to support the fund.

**In the Classroom**
- Connect with a local fitness instructor to offer fitness classes to staff or students during lunch hour or class time.
- Partner with local recreation centres to organize free swimming or skating for students throughout the year.
- Connect with local universities or colleges to have students assist with classroom activities.

**Student**
- Promote current free community activities to students and their families in newsletters, on your school's website and through social media (visit durham.ca/physicalactivity for a list of free activities in your community).

### Supporting complimentary resources to assist schools with planning, teaching and promoting physical activity within their communities are available online under the “For Schools” tab at durham.ca/physicalactivity. Public health nurses are assigned to schools in Durham Region. They can support you in addressing physical activity with your school community. For more information on Physical Activity in schools please contact your school’s public health nurse or call Durham Health Connection Line at 905-666-6241 or toll free 1-800-841-2729.