



Promoting Health in Minnesota Schools:

THE ACTIVE CLASSROOM

As society becomes more aware of and concerned with children's health issues, communities are turning to their schools to provide an environment that promotes both healthy eating and physical activity.¹ School policies supporting healthy eating and physical activity are an important component of school efforts to promote the health and well-being of school children. Good nutrition and physical activity help "contribute to improved academic performance, attendance rates, behavior, and lifelong health and well-being."² Providing a supportive, active classroom setting gives students opportunities to be physically active while teaching them new strategies for active living.³

What is an active classroom?

An active classroom provides opportunities for physical activity to students throughout the school day as part of classroom activities. For example, physical activity can be incorporated into daily lessons of other academic classes such as language arts, math, and science by teachers building physical activity into lessons and leading students in activity breaks to reduce "seat time."⁴

Examples of active classroom activities include:

- Physically acting out stories (such as "First Kid on the Moon")⁵
- Invisible jump rope, with the number of jumps determined by the answer to a math problem⁶
- Bending, stretching, and using yoga poses to demonstrate how joints and muscles work⁷
- Navigating a spelling bee obstacle course⁸
- Simulating a marching band playing to music⁹

Why are active classrooms important?

Because nearly all students in the U.S. are enrolled in schools, the classroom can offer multiple opportunities for students to engage in physical activity. These opportunities provide ways for all students to become more physically active, including those who are not athletically gifted and those that have special health care needs. In addition, physical activity in the classroom can be essential to helping students reach the daily recommended 60 minutes of physical activity.¹⁰

Do any federal or Minnesota laws require active classrooms?

No. However, the Minnesota Department of Education is developing a Healthy Schools Awards Program that will recognize K-12 schools for implementing policies and practices that give students opportunities to be physically active throughout the day (and support healthy food and beverage choices).¹¹

Does the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA)¹² Model Wellness Policy¹³ address active classrooms?

No, not specifically.

Could existing MSBA policies be used to support the creation and management of an active classroom?

Yes. The MSBA has several model policies that could be used to support the creation and management of an active classroom program, such as:

- 504 (Student Dress and Appearance)
- 601 (School Curriculum and Instruction Goals)
- 602 (Organization of School Calendar and School Day)
- 603 (Curriculum Development)
- 604 (Instructional Curriculum)

How can Minnesota schools incorporate an active classroom program into a school wellness policy?

The following language can be incorporated into a school board policy that follows the MSBA's model. This language can also be individually tailored to fit into a school board policy that does not follow the MSBA model policy.

Addition to the MSBA School Wellness Policy

III. GUIDELINES

D. Physical Activity

5. Active Classroom

1. For students to receive the nationally recommended amount of daily physical activity (i.e., at least 60 minutes per day) and for students to fully embrace regular physical activity as a personal behavior, students need opportunities for physical activity beyond physical education class.
2. Teachers will provide brief movement and/or physical activity breaks at appropriate times in the school day.
3. Students will not be required to engage in more than two hours of sedentary instruction without an opportunity to move and stretch.
4. Teachers and school staff should support learning through movement by integrating physical activity into lessons in subjects such as math, reading, and science when appropriate.
5. Activity breaks should be used to complement, not substitute for, physical education classes.¹⁴

Are there any other policy options that can be used relating to healthy classrooms?

In Minnesota, the superintendent is responsible for implementing and enforcing school board policy. Superintendents issue protocols, procedures, and guidelines to help implement the school board's policies. The following language can be incorporated into existing guidelines. However, as school boards and superintendents may adopt more specific or general guidelines based on their needs and goals, policy language can be interchangeable with the guidelines listed below.

Active Classroom Guidelines

- For students to receive the nationally recommended amount of daily physical activity (i.e., at least 60 minutes per day) and for students to fully embrace regular physical activity as a personal behavior, students need opportunities for physical activity beyond physical education class. Toward that end:
 - Classroom health education will complement physical education by reinforcing the knowledge and self-management skills needed to maintain a physically active lifestyle and to reduce time spent on sedentary activities, such as watching television;
 - Opportunities for physical activity will be incorporated into other subject lessons; and
 - Classroom teachers will provide short physical activity breaks between lessons or classes, as appropriate.¹⁵

Are there any other resources that may be helpful in developing an active classroom?

Yes. Several resources are available that can assist with making the case for active classrooms and developing policies to support their sustainability. These include:

- The *Let's Move in School – Superintendents and School Boards Toolkit* is designed to assess the level of physical education/activity currently provided by the school district. This tool is free online at http://www.aahperd.org/letsmoveinschool/tools/superintendent_school-board_toolkit.cfm.
- An *Active Living Research brief on physical activity in the classroom* provides a variety of research findings on the use of various active classroom programs. This brief is available at http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/issue_briefs/2013/rwjf404526.
- The following websites provide ideas on how to incorporate physical activity concepts into core curriculum instruction:¹⁶
 - *P.E. Central*: <http://www.pecentral.org/lessonideas/classroom/classroom.asp>
 - *Take 10*: <http://www.take10.net/>
 - *Energizers*: <http://www.ncpe4me.com/energizers.html>
 - *Brain Breaks*: <http://www.emc.cmich.edu/BrainBreaks/default.htm>

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For related publications, visit www.publichealthlawcenter.org

Endnotes

¹ See, e.g., *Local Wellness Policy: A Guide for Development*, MINN. DEP'T OF EDUC. 5 (Sept. 2005), available at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/cdrr/nutrition/docsandpdf/localwellnesspolicy.pdf>.

² *School Wellness Policies*, IDAHO DEP'T OF EDUC., <http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/cnp/wellness/> (last visited May 6, 2013).

³ *Let's Get PHYSICAL!*, NAT'L ASS'N FOR SPORT AND PHYS. EDUC., <http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/advocacy/events/upload/Let-s-Get-PHYSICAL.pdf> (last visited May 24, 2013).

⁴ *Creating a Physically Active School Year-Round*, NFL PLAY 60 CHALLENGE, AMER. HEART ASS'N, available at http://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@fc/documents/downloadable/ucm_318581.pdf.

⁵ *Stories in Space*, INT'L LIFE SCIENCES INST. RES. FOUND., available at <http://www.take10.net/pdf/3%20stories%20in%20space.pdf> (last visited May 30, 2013).

⁶ *Invisible Jump Rope*, INT'L LIFE SCIENCES INST. RES. FOUND., available at <http://www.take10.net/pdf/2%20invisible%20jump%20rope.pdf> (last visited May 30, 2013).

⁷ *Lesson Plan Tie-In: Bones, Muscles and Joints*, RECESS ROCKS! (Feb. 2012), available at http://www.recessrocks.com/downloads/CHC_RR_LPTIBones_F020112web.pdf.

⁸ *Spelling Bee Obstacle Course*, BRAIN BREAKS, available at <http://www.emc.cmich.edu/brainbreaks/activity/2-7.pdf> (last visited May 30, 2013).

⁹ *76 Trombones*, BRAIN BREAKS, available at <http://www.emc.cmich.edu/brainbreaks/activity/4-4.pdf> (last visited May 30, 2013).

¹⁰ *Model School Wellness Policies*, NAT'L ALLIANCE FOR NUTRITION AND ACTIVITY, <http://www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org/WellnessPolicies.html> (last visited May 29, 2013).

¹¹ MINN. STAT. § 124D.955 (2013); this initiative had not yet been operationalized at the time this resource was released.

¹² LEAGUE OF MINNESOTA CITIES, HANDBOOK FOR MINNESOTA CITIES 17:14 (2012), available at <http://www.lmc.org/media/document/1/chapter17.pdf> ("The Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) supports, promotes and enhances the work of public school boards. MSBA is a private nonprofit organization that provides technical assistance; cost-saving programs; and advocacy, training, research, and referral services for all of Minnesota's public [school members]. Membership in MSBA is voluntary.")

¹³ *MSBA/MASA Model Policy 533: Wellness*, MINN. SCHOOL BOARD ASS'N & MINN. ASS'N OF SCHOOL ADMIN. (2010).

¹⁴ *Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn: Chapter D: Policies to Promote Physical Activity and Physical Education*, NAT'L ASS'N OF STATE BOARDS OF EDUC. 39 (last updated 2012), available at http://www.nasbe.org/wp-content/uploads/FHRTL-D_Physical-Activity-NASBE-November-2012.pdf.

¹⁵ *Model School Wellness Policies*, *supra* note 10.

¹⁶ *Physical Education and Activity Toolkit*, MICH. ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS 13 (Dec. 2005), available at http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/TipsandToolsToPromotePEPA_290404_7.pdf.