

School Policies That Affect Physical Activity

School policies can impact the amount of physical activity that children receive on a regular basis. Because of this, it's important to be able to identify both **barrier policies**, which discourage, prohibit, or otherwise present barriers to physical activity, and **supportive policies**, which encourage, support, or enable physical activity opportunities.

For both supportive and barrier policies, the impact may be direct or indirect. A school policy that requires any student riding a bicycle to school to also wear a helmet is an example of a policy that directly demonstrates support of safe bicycling. In contrast, a school district policy that provides busing to all students regardless of where they live—including for those within easy walking or bicycling distance—is an example of a policy that indirectly discourages bicycling or walking to school.

All of these policies can be addressed at individual schools or across an entire school district. Policy change can seem intimidating, but remember that creative policies that integrate physical activity and learning are the best way to create sustainable changes in your school.

Policies that Affect Children Before and After School

- *Safe Routes to School Policy:* Ensure that your school has a policy that allows and encourages children to walk and bike to school using bike trains and walking school buses.
- *Bike Racks:* Install and promote bike racks at your school to encourage biking.
- *Remote Drop-Off:* By implementing a remote drop-off policy, children that are driven or bused still have an opportunity to be physically active before and after school.
- *Busing Policies:* Review busing policies to see what they say in regards to how close a child can live and still be bused.
- *Shared Use:* A shared-use policy allows courts, fields, and community buildings to be used by the community during non-school hours.
- *After School Care:* All after-school care programs should have policies requiring children to be active for a specified amount of time.

School Policies that Affect Physical Activity (cont.)

Policies that Affect Children During the School Day

- *Walking Clubs:* A policy that supports walking clubs can motivate children to get excited about being active. The club can include the entire school and consist of a weekly school walk (such as Walking Wednesdays or Moving Mondays).
- *Classroom Physical Activity Time:* Policies can require teachers to set aside time for physical activity breaks in between class time or to incorporate movement into lesson plans.
- *Active Assemblies:* A policy can require school assemblies to start with a physical activity.
- *Taking Away Recess as a Punishment:* A policy should be in place that says that recess cannot be lost as a punishment.
- *Active Recess:* Staff can participate in physical activity games with students on the playground during recess to discourage children from “sitting around.”

Policies that Affect School Staff

- *Non-Motorized Incentives:* Provide incentives for staff that walk, bike, or use public transportation to get to work.
- *Physical Activity Club for Staff:* Establish a staff physical activity club to create a supportive environment promoting healthy eating and active living together. Staff are in it together when they exercise and eat healthy meals together.
- *Active Meetings:* Encourage walking staff meetings or physical activity breaks during meetings.
- *Wellness Committee:* Start a wellness committee at your school to address any and all issues that are related to the overall health of the school body.

Related Information

Build Your Own Safe Routes to School District Policy (Safe Routes to School National Partnership and ChangeLab Solutions, 2014)

Built Environment Policies that Affect Physical Activity (Fire Up Your Feet, 2013)

Barrier Policy Tip Sheet (Safe Routes to School National Partnership, 2012)