Physical activity is known to be an important part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, but policies and programs aimed at improving the health and wellness of youth often overlook the importance of physical activity in their lives. Compounding the situation, many schools lack the resources and infrastructure to meet recommendations for daily physical activity and physical education during the school day.

New developments have improved the situation for after school physical activity. Thanks to state funding created by legislation in 2006, California has facilitated a tremendous expansion of school-based after school programs throughout the state. These programs provide an opportunity to supplement current efforts to promote physical activity among youth who are at greatest risk for obesity, lack of physical activity, and poor nutrition—young people of color living in low-income communities. At the same time, community-based organizations that have traditionally served youth during the after-school hours have been taking steps to improve the quality of their physical activity offerings. Organizations such as the Girl Scouts and the Boys & Girls Clubs have adopted curricula and programming that take an intentional approach to helping youth establish healthy habits through physical activity and good nutrition.1

Together, these two trends are leading toward increased opportunities for quality physical activity for youth throughout the state. However, these trends also present new challenges for after school providers, including how to accommodate physical activity in an atmosphere where academics are stressed, how to develop skilled programs amid high staff turnover, and how to make physical activity more appealing to girls.

This policy brief describes the landscape for physical activity directed at youth in California today—both in school and out—and some of the challenges after school programs face in including physical activity programming. It then provides advice on preparing staff to lead after school programs, gives examples of how school-based programs are teaming up with community resources to expand effective physical activity programming, and provides recommendations for how school- and community-based after school providers can work to get the support and cooperation of community partners, schools, and local and state agencies in promoting and developing physical activity for youth.
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY CONFERS BENEFITS BOTH IN SCHOOL AND OUT

Although we know that regular physical activity results in improved health for youth, there are other, less obvious benefits, including the development of self-esteem, pro-social behaviors, and resiliency to resist negative influences. Research also indicates that physical activity can have a positive impact on academic performance.

- A recent brief cites several pieces of research that have established a link between physical activity and learning outcomes, and refers to the following findings:
  - Numerous published studies over the past four decades have linked regular participation in physical activity with improved academic performance.
  - A national study of adolescents reported in 2006 that those who reported participating in organized physical activities like PE or team sports were 20 times more likely than their less-active peers to have earned an "A" in math or English.
  - Studies of elementary school-age children have found that regular opportunities for physical activity result in improved classroom behavior and concentration.
  - A 2006 study noted that students in kindergarten through fourth grade in North Carolina who were given a 10-minute daily activity break increased their on-task behavior by as much as 8 percent. Among the students in the sample who were the least on-task prior to the study, on-task behavior increased by as much as 20 percent.

The brief also notes the unfortunate lack of research on the academic and cognitive benefits of physical activity specifically for communities most at risk for health disparities: African American, Latino, Native American, Asian American and Pacific Islander youth, and youth who live in lower-income communities.

In addition to improved health and cognitive outcomes, providing youth with quality opportunities for physical activity can help keep them safe. According to Fight Crime: Invest In Kids, a national anti-crime advocacy group of law enforcement professionals, youth violence experts, and victims of violence, adolescents are more likely to commit or be the victims of crime, to be involved in a car accident, or to engage in high-risk behaviors such as smoking, drinking or using drugs during the hours between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. Providing youth with opportunities to participate in physical activities that speak to their interests, such as organized sports, martial arts, or dance, gives them an attractive alternative to environments that may be unsafe or that may facilitate their participation in high-risk behavior. Participation in organized sports can also yield emotional and behavioral benefits, such as improved self-esteem, and the opportunities for socialization that organized sports provide may foster a sense of peer acceptance and belonging.
WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

A number of barriers exist to physical activity being an integral part of a young person’s day. School district limitations, reduced access during the summer months, and the lure of electronic media all shrink young people’s involvement with exercise.

SCHOOLS FACE BARRIERS TO PROVIDING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

A national study of school health policies conducted in 2000 found that although the majority of elementary, middle, and high schools surveyed had policies in place requiring physical education, most of those schools did not in fact provide physical education on a daily basis. In California, there are disparities by income. A recent study found that California youth in lower-income school districts tend to be less physically active during school-based physical education than youth in schools in higher-income districts. And even schools that do provide regular physical education instruction often do not keep students sufficiently physically active during those classes for them to reap the benefits of activity.

There are often several factors that present barriers to schools in implementing physical activity and physical education programming. Schools may lack the infrastructure (equipment and facilities) to support physical education, and administrators may be concerned about liability resulting from accidents and disciplinary incidents on the playground. In addition, with districts’ budgets shrinking, staff who teach “extras” such as music and physical education are usually the first to be cut. Pressures to improve indicators of academic performance have also led some districts to increase classroom time at the expense of physical education.

For all of these reasons, the amount of time in the school day for recess - and therefore for unstructured physical activity - has been steadily decreasing. This trend appears to be greatest for low-income youth and students of color, as well as for students of all economic strata attending urban schools. A recent report examining statistics from the U.S. Department of Education on physical activity in public elementary schools found that schools where more than half the students were ethnic minorities and schools with a higher percentage of lower-income students (those receiving free or reduced-price school lunch) offered significantly less time for recess than did schools with children from a higher socioeconomic level.

WHEN SCHOOL IS OUT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ARE SCARCE

Not only are children and youth losing out on opportunities for physical activity during school, they are even less likely to have such opportunities during the summer months. Research has found that the rate of growth of children’s Body Mass Index (BMI), the standard measurement used to determine overweight and obesity, is likely to double during the summer months when school is out, while African American and Hispanic children experience comparatively lower rates of growth of their BMI when school is in session.

Approximately 10 percent of public school students attend summer school programs. Although data on access to and attendance rates of other summer programs, including those run by non-school public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and for-profit companies are scant at best, research has indicated that low-income children have fewer opportunities for summer recreation and enrichment programming than do children from higher-income families. Even when children and youth have access to summer programming, it is often the case that no one provider is able to provide a full range of
activities, including physical and recreational, that make up effective summer programs.\textsuperscript{11}

THE PREOCCUPATION WITH MEDIA ALSO SHORTCHANGES PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Research conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation indicates that youth spend an average of six and a half hours every day of the week using electronic media, compared to just one and a half hours spent being physically active.\textsuperscript{12} More time spent watching television and using other forms of electronic media translates to less time spent outdoors engaged in physical activity.\textsuperscript{13}

Data collected over a seven-year period by California Adolescent Nutrition and Fitness (CANFit) from community-based organizations working with low-income, adolescents of color found that one-third of youth surveyed watched three or more hours of TV per day. In addition, slightly more than one-third (35 percent) of Latino youth in these studies watched four or more hours of TV each day.\textsuperscript{14} This behavior may be attributable, at least in part, to environments in communities of color that make it difficult to be physically active, including fears about safety, and parents or caregivers relying on TV to keep youth occupied in the hours after school.\textsuperscript{15}

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN THE AFTER SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT IS GAINING ATTENTION

AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS ARE IMPORTANT FOR PROVIDING YOUTH WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN A NUMBER OF WAYS:

- Programming takes place during hours when children and youth are usually physically active;
- Programming and schedules are flexible and can be tailored to students’ interests; after school programs are often sponsored by entities, such as the YMCA, that have traditionally had a focus on physical fitness and physical activity; after school practitioners work with smaller groups of youth and have traditionally been more inclusive of youth with varying physical abilities; and after school programs are increasingly reaching low- and moderate-income youth.\textsuperscript{16}

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN AFTER SCHOOL IS MORE THAN JUST “PLAY”

Physical activity programming is typically not as systematic or comprehensive as physical education, and programs tend to vary in the types of physical activities that are offered. Nonetheless, they cover a variety of activities. A preliminary evaluation of after school programs involved in the California Endowment’s Healthy Eating, Active Communities (HEAC) program identified six categories of physical activities offered at the programs: competitive sports, individual activities, dance and cheerleading, exercise, team games, and free play. When asked about what types of physical activities they offered youth, other after school providers most frequently cited both informal and organized competitive sports, including basketball and baseball. Individual activities, such as jump rope and martial arts, were the next most frequently mentioned activities, and dance and cheerleading were third. Exercise-oriented activities and non-competitive team activities were also reported.\textsuperscript{17}

The best programs evidence three characteristics of quality for after school physical activity programming identified by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education:\textsuperscript{18}

- Activities are voluntary and participants have a choice of activities.
- All students are given opportunities to participate, regardless of physical ability.
- Students are engaged in planning, organizing and implementing physical activity programming.

THE GROWTH OF AFTER SCHOOL HAS EXPANDED OPPORTUNITIES FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

In 2006, the state implemented Proposition 49, an initiative sponsored in 2002 by Arnold Schwarzenegger that added $428 million to the budget for the state-funded After School Education and Safety (ASES) Program, formerly the Before and After School Learning and Safe Neighborhood Partnerships Program.\textsuperscript{19} Virtually overnight, the number of state-funded after school programs doubled. Now children, youth, and families in approximately 4,000 neighborhoods throughout the state have access to a school-based after school program.

Among the many impacts of this expansion has been the increase in opportunities for safe and supervised physical activity for low-income youth of color. (Because of the overwhelming number of...
applications submitted for the ASES grants, awards were limited to schools in which more than half of the students qualified for the federal free or reduced-price school meal program. (Research has shown that these youth face significant environmental barriers to physical activity, including lack of access to parks, outdoor spaces, and fitness facilities; concerns about personal safety and crime in their neighborhood; costs related to membership fees, equipment fees, or transportation to and from fitness facilities; and cultural norms related to physical activity.)

Low-income adolescents of color, in particular, benefit from the opportunities for physical activity that after school programs provide. Data collected among grantees of California Adolescent Nutrition and Fitness (CANFit) between 1995 and 2002 indicate that the low-income youth who participated in after school programs provided by these community-based organizations were more likely to report being physically active than youth surveyed in a school setting. To put this success in perspective, consider that if all publicly funded after school programs in California were to include at least 30 minutes of quality physical activity in their daily programming, it could affect the health of as many as 800,000 to 1 million children and youth in low-income communities in California.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN STATE-FUNDED AFTER SCHOOL

Although physical activity has traditionally been integrated into the structure of most after school programs, state and local policies and initiatives have tended to focus more on the nutrition side of the obesity equation, emphasizing the quality of foods and snacks in these programs without comparable attention to the corollary need for physical activity to burn calories. However, recently passed legislation has encouraged physical activity in state-funded programs. SB 638, the 2006 legislation that introduced a number of changes to ASES, requires ASES programs to provide opportunities for physical activity.

The legislation also mandates that part of the support and technical assistance provided to ASES grant recipients include voluntary guidelines for physical activity programs. The California Department of Education’s After School Partnerships Office is currently working with a number of physical activity, fitness, and health experts to develop the voluntary guidelines, which are expected to be distributed to ASES-funded programs on or before July 1, 2009.

CHALLENGES REMAIN: PROGRAM POLICIES AND PRACTICES CAN PRESENT BARRIERS TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Despite their best intentions, the policies and practices of after school providers can result in overemphasizing academic outcomes at the risk of hindering their efforts to promote health and fitness. Stakeholders often consider academics to be the primary focus of after school programs, parents rely on programs to help their children complete homework, and schools often look to programs to provide extra learning opportunities to help boost student achievement. As a result, after school providers may feel pressured to prioritize homework and academic enrichment activities at the expense of physical activity. In addition, practices to reward or provide incentives to youth and even staff can promote sedentary behavior. For example, an after school program might offer movie passes as a reward for a young person’s consistent program attendance. A staff recognition day might involve a trip to watch a sporting event or an opportunity to engage in other sedentary activities.
PROVIDING QUALITY AFTER SCHOOL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMMING REQUIRES COMMITMENT AND THOUGHTFUL PLANNING AS WELL AS SKILLED AND KNOWLEDGEABLE ACTIVITY LEADERS. AFTER SCHOOL STAFF BRING WITH THEM A PASSION FOR WORKING WITH YOUTH AND AN ABILITY TO LEAD GROUP ACTIVITIES, BUT THEY TYPICALLY HAVE LITTLE, IF ANY, FORMAL TRAINING IN IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZED PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES. ACCORDINGLY, AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM LEADERS ARE PLACING GREATER IMPORTANCE ON TRAINING AND SUPPORTING STAFF TO IMPLEMENT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMMING.

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS HAVE BECOME CREATIVE IN STAFF TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The most frequently cited barrier to training staff to implement physical activity programming is a lack of funding to purchase training and materials for professional development. This problem is compounded by the fact that after school programs tend to offer low pay and little room for advancement, leaving them often staffed by entry-level personnel or college students on summer jobs. The resulting relatively high staff turnover forces the programs to dedicate their limited time and resources to orienting new staff members rather than advancing the skills of steady employees. A recent study on the after school workforce concluded that as many as 60 percent of part-time after school workers will leave the job in less than three years.25

One solution after school programs have implemented has been to contract with sports, fitness, and health-oriented organizations such as the YMCA and city parks and recreation departments to run the after school programs outright or to provide specific physical activity programming. After school providers have also made use of free or low-cost training and materials provided by local health departments and agencies and by health-focused organizations such as the American Cancer Society. Programs have also invested in “turnkey” physical activity training and curricula that can be easily implemented by new staff.
RESOURCES TO HELP AFTER SCHOOL PROFESSIONALS GET KIDS MOVING

There are numerous research-based, tested, and proven physical activity toolkits and curricula designed specifically for after school programs, including the following:

- Action for Healthy Kids and National Football League’s ReCharge! (http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/special_after.php)
- CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health) Kids Club (http://www.catchinfo.org/getinfoproducts.asp#catchPE)
- Media-Smart Youth: Eat, Think, and Be Active! (http://www.nichd.nih.gov/msy/)
- SPARK After School (http://www.sparkpe.org/programAfterschool.jsp)

There are also resources to help after school programs find additional tested and proven curricula:

- The California After School Resource Center (http://www.californiaafterschool.org) is a virtual lending library that offers free access to peer-reviewed toolkits and curricula, including those specific to health.
- The California Healthy Kids Resource Center (http://www.hkresources.org) provides access to reviewed health promotion materials, including those specific to after school.
- The National Institute on Out-of-School Time (http://www.niost.org) published a review of 20 physical activity and nutrition curricula based on six major standards identified by the National AfterSchool Association.
- The American College for Sports Medicine (http://www.acsm.org) is another resource for physical activity information and materials.

AFTER SCHOOL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY – GETTING IT RIGHT

The six communities that are funded through the California Endowment’s HEAC Program are working to improve environments for healthy eating and physical activity and to create momentum for widespread changes in policy and practice. Following are examples of strategies HEAC communities have employed to improve physical activity opportunities in after school programs that can serve as models for other communities.

MAKING GOOD USE OF LIMITED TIME FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Kaiser Permanente, a partner in the 57th Assembly District Grassroots Nutrition and Physical Activity Team in Baldwin Park, Los Angeles, runs a homework assistance program that serves 40 to 50 youth for one hour each day. Because of the short duration and academic focus of the program, finding time to add physical activity to the schedule had been a challenge. With funds made available from the HEAC grant, Kaiser Permanente was able to bring in CANFit, a technical assistance provider for the HEAC program, to train the staff on how to provide short energy breaks. The program has since instituted a policy of providing 10 minutes of physical activity for every hour of programming.
CONNECTING AFTER SCHOOL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TO THE SCHOOL DAY

For the eight after school programs in the Santa Ana Unified School District that are part of HEAC - Santa Ana, a focus on blending health education and skill-building into after school physical activity programming is helping the schools meet their physical education goals. The district has made it a priority to ensure that physical activity and nutrition practices and policies are consistent and "seamless" from the school day to the after school hours. As part of this effort, the district works to ensure that the physical activity programming in all of the after school programs is geared toward developing and building on the skills that are assessed in California’s required physical performance test, the FITNESSGRAM, given each year to all public school 5th, 7th, and 9th graders. Along with improved fitness, principals have seen improvement in the behaviors and attitudes of the program participants.

GETTING ALL OF THE PLAYERS ONTO THE SAME PAGE

Typical of many out-of-school-time programs, Chula Vista Elementary School District, a partner in the HEAC South Bay Partnership - Chula Vista Community Collaborative, involves a number of different agencies and organizations in its after school programming. Providers and partners include the after school provider Club TC (Teen Connection), the City of Chula Vista Park and Recreation Department, YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, the City of Chula Vista, and the American Youth Soccer Organization. Though each of the providers and partners implements their own training and staff development around physical activity and nutrition within their organization throughout the school year, the Partnership brings all of the partners and their staff together for joint interagency trainings on physical activity and nutrition. Thus all of the partners have an opportunity to build their skills and knowledge. Moreover, bringing them together helps them to align their practices and provides a space to review and reinforce the mission of the HEAC program.

COLLABORATING TO STRETCH LIMITED RESOURCES

When setting out to implement changes in environment and policies to improve the physical activity behaviors among youth in their communities, organizations and agencies in the South Shasta Healthy Eating, Active Communities Collaborative ran into the same barriers that are endemic to most rural communities: a small number of partners and limited resources. By encouraging the joint use of facilities, the Collaborative has been able to increase community, school, and after school access to facilities for physical activity. For example, one high school lacked a gymnasium in which to conduct school-day sports and activities, and the city park and recreation department lacked a facility for its after school programming. Realizing that they had a common need, the school and the park and recreation department approached the city together with a request for funding to construct a new gymnasium that would be jointly used. The request was granted, and the high school and park and recreation department now have access to a brand-new facility.
The following recommendations can help communities design and implement after school programs that provide quality opportunities for physical activity:

AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

- Encourage park and recreation departments to establish policies and practices that support after school program providers in their efforts to promote physical activity, including providing training for after school staff and access to facilities.
- Promote joint-use agreements and special design of school facilities to allow after school programs access to space even when schools are closed for holidays and intersessions.
- Connect school-year after school programs and the children they serve with summer recreation programs to ensure continuity of programming.
- Focus on longer-term outcomes by emphasizing policies that change environments to support healthy behaviors and improve organizational practices, rather than on short-term outcomes such as weight reduction.
- Explore how after school programs can help build a culturally competent recreation and physical activity workforce for California.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN AFTER SCHOOL

- Create, adopt, and implement policies and guidelines that set standards for physical activity in after school programs.
- Ensure that new after school physical activity policies and guidelines are explicit, effective, and culturally responsive.
- Adopt policies that set a minimum requirement for physical activity; after school programs should provide at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity every day.
- Ensure that after-school physical activity and nutrition practices and policies are consistent with and supportive of policies for physical activity and nutrition that schools and/or districts have in place pertaining to the school day (such as Local Wellness Policies).
  - Find healthy alternatives for rewards and incentives for both youth and program staff and avoid those that promote sedentary behavior, such as movie passes or tickets to sporting events.
  - Plan fundraising events that incorporate physical activity - for example, jump-ropes or races - as a healthy alternative to activities such as bake sales or candy sales.
  - Offer a variety of physical activities and involve youth in deciding what types of activities are offered.
  - Ensure that organized physical activities are voluntary and are designed and implemented in a way that allows all students to participate, regardless of skill level or ability.
  - Include educational components in physical activity programming so students have an opportunity to learn about the benefits of physical activity.
  - Invest in professional development, training, and materials to enable staff to implement effective physical activity programming.
  - Design physical activity curricula and toolkits for staff without prior experience in or background knowledge of physical activity, and design the activities so staff can, with little preparation, jump right into leading them.
  - Ensure that physical activity curricula and toolkits used in the program are appropriate for staff who may lack experience in leading organized physical activity and that activities are designed in a way that they can be implemented with little preparation.
  - Involve community-based organizations and agencies with expertise in providing physical activity and health education, such as the YM/YWCA, city park and recreation departments, and Boys and Girls Clubs, in designing and implementing physical activity programming.
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ENDNOTES

1 Girls Scouts of the USA's Healthy Girls, Healthy Lives initiative and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America’s Triple Play program are two examples.


23 Available at: http://www.canfit.org/pdf/ALLFACTS.pdf.


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ABOUT CANFIT
CANFIT helps bridge the gap between communities and policymakers. Since 1993, we have been at the heart of the movement to improve healthy eating and physical activity environments for adolescents in low income communities and communities of color. From grassroots to government, we work with community-based and youth-serving organizations to identify local solutions and support the development of culturally competent policy and practices.