

## **Report: More PE, Activity Programs Needed in Schools**

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Kids need to break a sweat at school.

Students should be doing at least 60 minutes of vigorous or moderate-intensity physical activity at school, with more than half of the activity occurring during regular educational hours and the remaining amount before and after school, says a report released Thursday by the Institute of Medicine.

Estimates suggest that only about half of U.S. kids meet the government's physical-activity guideline of doing at least 60 minutes of vigorous or moderate-intensity physical activity every day, the report says. School is the best place for kids to be physically active because they spend so much time there, it says.

Among the recommendations from the expert committee convened by the institute:

- Elementary school children should spend at least 30 minutes a day in PE class; middle school and high school students should get an average of 45 minutes a day in PE. That's 150 minutes a week for elementary kids and 225 minutes for middle and high school students.
- At least half of the PE class time should be spent doing vigorous to moderate-intensity physical activity
- Students should do additional vigorous or moderate-intensity activity throughout the day, including during recess, during classroom breaks that are physically active or in other active-learning opportunities.
- There should be other options to be physically active before and after school, including intramural and extramural sports, active before- and after-school programs and walking/biking/skateboarding to and from school.

"This is a whole-of-school approach. It's not just physical education. It's everything that occurs during school as well as around the school day," says Harold Kohl III, professor of epidemiology and kinesiology at the University of Texas School of Public Health and chair of the committee that did the report.

In many schools, physical-education classes and recess have been squeezed out because of increasing educational demands and tough financial times. Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, 44% of school administrators report cutting significant time from PE and recess so there's more time for subjects such as reading and math, the report says.

Mark Terry, president of the National Association of Elementary School Principals and a principal at Eubanks Intermediate School in Southlake, Texas, says, "We all want healthy kids. It's a great goal, but a difficult one.

"You have to look at the unintended consequences of things like this. They are well-meaning, and they are good for kids, but you have to alter the amount of time you have for other subjects," he says. "The problem is, what

are you going to do less of? Are you going to do away with art or cut back on music or cut back on the minutes you have in the classroom?"

Having programs before and after school sounds like a good idea, but the question is who is going to run them and who is going to pay for them, Terry says.

Kohl responds: "We tried to be realistic in these recommendations, and there are creative ways to work these things without sacrificing other subject matter."

Currently, a third of children in the USA are overweight or obese, putting them at greater risk of developing a host of debilitating and costly diseases, including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Physical activity improves kids' fitness, lowers their risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes, and helps build strong bones and muscles. Children who are more active have greater attention spans and better academic performance, the report says.

The report recommends that the Department of Education designate physical education as a core subject like math and reading. "It is as important because it affects kids' health, cognitive function and overall development," Kohl says.

The report urges state legislatures and departments of education to adopt and/or strengthen physical education and recess policies, as well as before- and after-school policies, to meet the goals the report outlines.