

# Promoting Physical Activity in a School Setting

## DEFINITIONS:

- **Physical Activity** is movement using the body that requires energy and increases heart rate and respiratory rate. Examples include intentional structured physical activity like sports or fitness classes, active recreation like hiking, active play, active transportation, daily activities such as housecleaning or gardening, and creative activities such as dance.
- **Physical Literacy** is the *motivation, confidence, physical competence* (fundamental movement skills), and *knowledge/understanding* to value and take responsibility to be *active for life*.

## CONTEXT:

- The [Canadian 24 hour movement guidelines](#) recommend that for optimum health benefits, children aged 5-17 years strive for:
  - SWEAT:** at least 60 minutes of physical activity that makes you breathe harder than normal every day
  - STEP:** several hours of a variety of structured and unstructured light physical activity every day
  - SLEEP:** 9 to 11 hours (5-13 years) or 8 to 10 hours (14-17 years) of uninterrupted sleep every night
  - SIT:** less than 2 hours of recreational screen time every day; limited sitting for extended periods
- 18% of BC students aged 12-17 meet the “Sweat” guidelines; 10% do not take part in this level of physical activity on any day of the week
  - In 2013, 13.6% of students in grades 7-12 in the VCH region reported at least 60 minutes of PA on each of the past seven days



## KEY MESSAGES:

- Children who are more physically active are happier and have better academic achievement, quality of life, and overall health
- Physical activity leads to better [physical health](#): it reduces the risk of developing several chronic diseases and helps manage many chronic conditions
- Physical activity also improves [cognition, brain function, and mental health](#)
- Research indicates that childhood physical activity leads to improved:
 

✓ Thinking and learning	✓ Brain plasticity – growth of new brain tissue
✓ Emotional regulation and self-control	✓ Stress management
✓ Problem-solving ability	✓ Ability to cope with anxiety and depression
✓ Memory	✓ Self-esteem, confidence and self-worth
- Physical activity helps release dopamine and serotonin (happy hormones), and more active kids experience fewer depression-related symptoms
- Physical activity and sleep are interconnected: the more kids sleep, the more energy they have, and the more kids are active, the more they will sleep.

# Ideas to Promote Physical Activity at School using a Comprehensive School Health Approach

## School Policies

Consider:

- Activity before learning and before lunch
- Daily opportunities for PA and active play during school hours
- “No car zone” in front of school
- “Outdoor in the rain” policy
- After school care for students who are on teams
- Avoiding removal of opportunities for PA and outdoor play as punishment
- Student active travel planning and policies ([School Travel Planning Toolkit](#))

## Physical & Social Environments

Consider:

- Open gym (before/after school and at lunch), and evening/weekend access
- Bike lockers/racks; showers for staff
- Clubs and teams; intramurals
- Events that are student inclusive (offer a variety of activities)
- Technology (e.g., Fitbit challenge)
- PL obstacle courses/ decals painted in school hallways and outdoor spaces (e.g., [Active For Life – “Don’t Walk in the Hallway”](#))



## Community Partnerships

Consider:

- PAC led activities (e.g. [walking school bus](#))
- [Active and safe routes to school](#)
- Bike safety workshops ([HUB](#) and other programs)
- Access to school facilities for evening/weekend programs
- Partnering with local First Nations for culturally relevant physical activity opportunities (e.g., indigenous sports and dancing)
- Partnerships between health, education, recreation, municipalities, and sport to advance PA/PL initiatives (e.g. [Unleashing Summer Awesome](#))

## Teaching & Learning

Consider:

- Promoting daily physical activity: [24-Hour Movement Guidelines](#)
- [BC Physical and Health Education Curriculum](#)
- [Bike and walk to school weeks](#)
- [Reinforcing benefits of mental health and academic success](#)
- Outdoor learning opportunities
- Promoting the importance of physical activity to parents
- Counsellors promoting physical activity and the link to mental health
- Interrupting long periods of sitting with active breaks

### VCH SUPPORT

- ✓ We can support these conversations with data and presentations to parents or teachers if interested
- ✓ We can facilitate linkages with local community partners

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[24-hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth](#), [ParticipACTION Resources](#), [Toolkit for Developing and Influencing PA Policy \(PARC\)](#), [Let’s Get Moving](#), [Sport for Life](#), [Physical Literacy](#), [PA & Brain Health](#), [Live 5-2-1-0](#), [HealthLinkBC](#)