

Reducing Obesity Rates in Illinois: The Path to Enhanced Physical Education



More Information

Enhance Physical Education in Illinois
www.isbe.state.il.us/EPE

Illinois Public Health Institute
www.iphionline.org

Illinois Department of Public Health
www.idph.state.il.us/pdf/EnhancedPE_StrategicPlan_Final2.pdf

The Community Guide: Community Preventive Services Task Force Recommendations on Promoting Physical Activity
www.thecommunityguide.org/pa

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Physical Activity Facts
www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/physicalactivity/facts.htm

Obesity rates in the United States have risen significantly in the last few decades. In Illinois in particular, nearly two thirds (62%) of adult residents are overweight or obese.¹ More than a quarter (27%) of Illinois adolescents were overweight or obese, and only 24 percent of adolescents and teens were physically active for at least 60 minutes per day. This is despite the fact that nearly 70 percent of students attended daily physical education classes in an average week.²

In 2010, Illinois developed a State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) in an effort to identify priority health issues and prevention-based strategies to improve the health of all Illinois residents. The SHIP identified nine priority health concerns, one of which was obesity rates in Illinois. The improvement plan calls for the implementation of individual, family, environmental, and policy interventions to increase physical activity as a key strategy to address obesity.

Identifying an Appropriate Evidence-Based Strategy

With information from the SHIP, the Illinois Public Health Institute and the Illinois Department of Public Health called together voluntary partners from multiple organizations, including the Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois legislature, Healthy Schools, the American Heart Association, and other health organizations to identify an evidence-based intervention strategy that would address the SHIP obesity priority by increasing physical activity. This newly-created task force reviewed evidence-based strategies in *The Guide to Community Preventive Services* (*The Community Guide*) and decided that enhanced school-based physical education (enhanced P.E.) was the most appropriate method to implement for a couple of reasons. First, it lent itself well to policy approaches and encouraged engagement from multiple partners within both the health and education sectors. Secondly, it was similar to pre-existing initiatives, such as the Obesity Action Roadmaps from the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity.³

The Illinois school system comprises more than 800 independent school districts, including nearly 4,500 schools and serves more than two million children. To enact an intervention on such a large scale, the first step was to engage local decision makers in understanding the importance of physical activity to wellness in order to implement an enhanced P.E. program in Illinois schools. The goal was to create a cultural shift that makes high quality P.E. a priority for all schools in order for students to realize the lifetime benefits of exercise and fitness. To realize this goal, the voluntary task force produced a plan to partner with local superintendents, school boards, and principals to implement the use of enhanced P.E. programs for all schools in Illinois.

What is Enhanced P.E.?

Enhanced P.E. is recommended by the Community Guide Task Force based on strong evidence of its effectiveness in improving physical activity levels and physical fitness among children and adolescents. Other positive effects associated with school-based P.E. include increases in physical activity knowledge and increased muscular endurance. Enhanced P.E. entails increasing the amount of time students spend in moderate to vigorous physical activity while in P.E. class to at least 50 percent of class time. Extensive research shows that children who are more physically active and fit also have improved cognitive function, perform better in class and on standardized tests, and have better classroom behaviors. These outcomes are important to school and district administrators as they strive to meet rigorous standards for students' academic achievement.



www.thecommunityguide.org

What is The Community Guide?

The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide) is an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. It provides evidence-based recommendations about public health interventions and policies to improve health and promote safety.

The Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force)—an independent, nonfederal, unpaid panel of public health and prevention experts—bases its recommendations on systematic reviews of the scientific literature. With oversight from the Task Force, scientists and subject-matter experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conduct these reviews in collaboration with a wide range of government, academic, policy, and practice-based partners.

Building Partnerships and Obtaining Consensus

In the summer of 2012, the Illinois legislature and Governor Pat Quinn established the Enhance P.E. Task Force through Public Act 97-1102, convening more than thirty school, physical education, health experts, and stakeholders from across the state. This task force was charged with promoting enhanced P.E. through strategies that aligned with the original strategic plan and recommending updates to Illinois student learning standards for physical development and health.

The Enhance P.E. Task Force implemented an outreach strategy to inform and engage key audiences. This involved a tour of schools throughout Illinois, where members of the task force used promotional materials to increase education about enhanced P.E. These materials included: a summary of the latest neuroscience research on the connection between fitness, physical activity, and learning; a fact sheet on the learning, behavior, and health benefits of enhanced P.E. and an accompanying presentation template for use by local communities; an Enhanced P.E. Resource Guide with implementation tools and guidelines; and webinars to support dissemination of key messages and Enhance P.E. Task Force recommendations for upgrading K-12 learning standards and promoting enhanced P.E.

Gaining Dedicated Advocates for Enhanced P.E.

The Enhance P.E. Task Force recommended 19 key policies and strategies for delivering evidence-based enhanced P.E. related to:

- Training and professional development for teachers and other stakeholders
- Promoting leadership on enhanced P.E. among school district and school officials
- Implementing measures to assess the impact of enhanced P.E.
- Identifying and seeking local, state, and national resources to support enhanced P.E. in schools

Because of the tremendous preparedness of the Enhance P.E. Task force with regard to information and materials, their strategies and policies were very well received in local communities. Many people became staunch champions of the enhanced P.E. in the course of the implementation, with many different organizations working together to promote this project. The most exciting part of the project, according to Elissa Bassler, the CEO of the Illinois Public Health Institute, were the alliances made between the health and education community. The new enhanced P.E. standards are expected to be implemented in every school in Illinois in the 2015-2016 academic school year.

Lessons Learned

- **Evidence-based interventions can appeal to many audiences.** Enhanced school-based P.E. appeals to educators because it improves students' physical activity levels and fitness, which research suggests may help improve students' academic performance.
- **Engage key stakeholders in decision-making.** Representatives from the state associations representing school and district officials, teachers, disability advocates, and others contributed to the development of consensus recommendations for promoting enhanced P.E. and improving the K-12 learning standards that are meaningful to all.
- **Adopt or adapt interventions accordingly.** Successful implementation of evidence-based strategies can be achieved through many avenues. It is important to implement them in the context and reality of the state and local communities.

1. CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Prevalence and Trend Data—Overweight and Obesity, U.S. Obesity Trends, Trends by State 2010. Available online at www.cdc.gov/brfss.

2. CDC, Division of Adolescent and School Health. The 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Available online at www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm.

3. Obesity Action Roadmap Illinois. Available online at www.preventobesityil.org/Obesity_Action_Roadmap_Main.html.