

healthy schools ALBERTA

FALL 2017 • ISSUE #8



Supporting Healthy School Communities!



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Bike Program Builds Leadership, Confidence and Resiliency

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Recess: Taking a Break to Foster Overall Health

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ISSUE

Happy September. Ever Active Schools is grateful for the opportunity to visit, listen to and see inspiring work from across the province and beyond. We are amazed by the commitments of staff, students and the community to prioritize wellness in their schools. Positivity ripples from community to community, so please keep telling your story as loud as you can and we are always here to help. Please reach out and we look forward working alongside you. Please reach us at info@everactive.org or [@everactiveab](https://www.instagram.com/everactiveab)

~ The Ever Active Schools Team



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BACK TO SCHOOL!
The EAS team is excited for a new school year, and the adventures it will bring in student well-being, active collaboration and healthy school communities. In the spirit of back to school, here's our EAS Flashback Yearbook!



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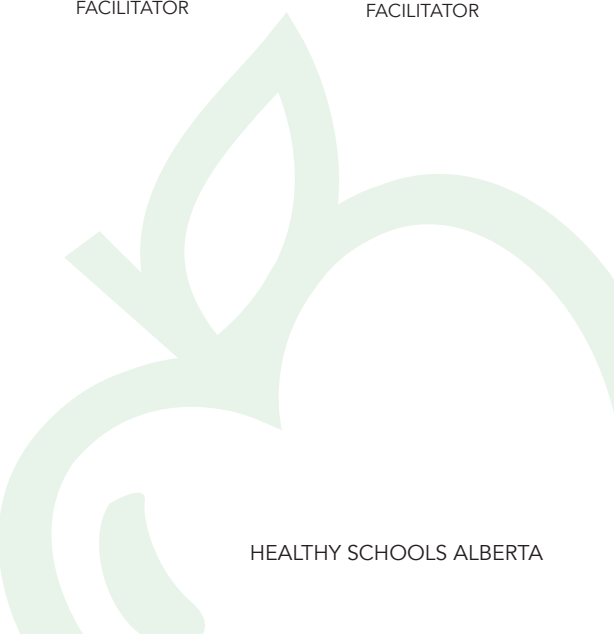
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PLAN YOUR YEAR

2017-18 Healthy School Community Events

HEALTHY ACTIVE SCHOOLS SYMPOSIA

The Leader Within: Illustrating Growth. Healthy Active School Symposia run from Fall 2017 to Spring 2018. Check website for dates and locations near you. This year's theme focuses on finding the leader within through the arts, creative expression and a growth mindset.

<https://everactive.org/hass>

ARPA

Join the Alberta Recreation Parks Association for their annual conference October 26th to 28th, 2017 at the Fairmount Lake Louise. This year's theme is, "Change, Challenge and Opportunity."

<http://arpaonline.ca/events/energize-conference>

RESILIENCY SUMMIT: HONOURING YOUTH VOICE

November 23 and 24, 2017. The Resiliency Summit is a gathering for Indigenous youth, educators and recreation professionals to share and learn best practices in developing holistic wellness and resiliency in their communities. <https://www.everactive.org/rw>

PAN-CANADIAN SCHOOL HEALTH SUMMIT: SHAPING THE FUTURE 2018

January 31, 2018 to February 3, 2018. Join provincial, territorial and national leaders in education, health, active living, research and policy to contribute to shared work and build a network of support for healthy school communities.

<https://everactive.org/stf>

THE ALBERTA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION YOUTH RUN CLUB

Start a free, fun and flexible Alberta Medical Association Youth Run Club in your school community this fall. Find out more here:

<https://www.amayouthrunclub.com>

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING & MENTORSHIP

Ever Active Schools offers a wide range of professional learning in a variety of topic areas that support healthy school communities. We are excited to announce a new line-up of unique mentorship opportunities in physical literacy, and social and emotional well-being. Contact us today at info@everactive.org or visit <https://www.everactive.org/plos> for more information and to request a visit. ■

Visit www.everactive.org to discover other Ever Active Schools events and projects.



Photo: Last day at the Spring Break Camp!

Indigenous Youth Receive High School Credit for Achieving Key Sport, Recreation and Wellness Certifications

WRITTEN BY KATELYNN THEAL, COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL HEALTH COORDINATOR & MELISSA TIERNEY, RESILIENCY COORDINATOR, EVER ACTIVE SCHOOLS

In just one week of spring break, 23 Indigenous high school students received certifications and skills in coaching and officiating soccer and volleyball; the importance of physical activity; concussion awareness; First Aid/CPR; and more, all within a culturally-relevant framework.

Every morning began with a smudge and a prayer with an Edmonton Public School Board knowledge keeper before students shared breakfast together, building bonds across the 9 high schools they represented. The agenda was daunting, with each of the 9 days packed with required material. Students persevered, participating with near perfect attendance in sessions that favoured hands-on, active learning over classroom-style instruction. Their commitment paid off: students received between two to four high school credits, and one completing an extra project to receive the last five credits she needed to graduate.

"[I want to focus on] eating healthier, waking up at a good time, being more motivated, pay more attention to detail, be more open and upfront, get into a good, everyday routine." - Student

Youth were attracted to the camp for a variety of reasons: Most were drawn by the certifications they would receive, as well as the opportunity for high school course credit; others had career aspirations of refereeing or coaching; some wanted to meet youth from other schools; and many had an interest in the cultural aspect of the program.

"I'm learning that I'm still growing and it's okay to not be perfect and try and excel in everything." - Student

After the program, the students expressed how much they had gained, including learning about their own health and fitness, about positive relationships, and how much they could push past their comfort zones:

"I learned that I have a lot of supportive people/friends/adults." - Student

The Camp was part of the Miyomahchihowin project, which means "in good health" in Cree, through a partnership between Edmonton Public School Board and Ever Active Schools. Funding was provided by the Urban Partnerships (UP) Program from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.

"I'm stronger than I thought. I believe in myself." - Student

Many provincial and community partners came together to make this camp a success, and third party evaluation showed that it had a positive impact on urban Indigenous youth participation in the economy, by providing opportunities to gain high school credits, skills, training and qualifications in the sport and recreation sector. Community organizations like Red cross, Alberta Soccer Association and others prepared participants to leave the camp qualified to begin refereeing community mini soccer games, and junior high volleyball games. They instilled confidence in the youth to head to their local recreation centres and increase physical activity, and supported youth in taking a step closer to high school completion.

Ever Active Schools thanks the Centre for Race and Culture for preparing the Evaluation Report for the Miyomahchihowin project. Visit <https://everactive.org/eas-reports/> to view the full report. ■



Winter: Love It or Hate It, It’s Coming!

WRITTEN BY CHESA CORSIATTO, SCHOOL HEALTH FACILITATOR, EVER ACTIVE SCHOOLS

For those of us who live north of the 49th parallel, winter is a big part of our year, our lives and our culture, yet as the days get shorter, temperatures drop and the school year ramps up. It’s common to want to hide away and hibernate. A growing body of scientific research shows that spending time outdoors has, “discernable benefits for physical and mental health (1).” Yes, even when it’s cold! Furthermore, moderate physical activity may boost immunity (2), energy levels (3), and mood (4). So go outside, get active and increase your sense of well-being this winter.

Things to remember:

- Dress in Layers:** Layers are the key to staying warm in the winter! The basic winter layering system is a base layer, an insulating layer and an outer layer. The base layer is closest to your skin and should be made of a material that can wick away moisture, such as wool. The insulating layer helps to retain heat by trapping air close to your body. Wool, down, synthetic down or fleece are recommended for this middle layer. The outer layer protects you from the elements - wind, rain, snow! There are many options for outer layers and what’s best will depend on the weather and the intensity of your activity.
- Sun Safety:** Ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun can be just as damaging in the winter as during the summertime. UV rays can penetrate through clouds, fog and haze. Furthermore, the snow reflects up to 80% of UV radiation. Therefore, sunscreen is just as important in the winter months. Cover exposed body parts, such as your face with SPF 30+ fifteen minutes prior to going outside. Wear UVA/UVB wrap around sunglasses to protect your eyes. (5)
- Stay Hydrated:** The cold and dry air can increase risk of dehydration. Make sure to stay hydrated by drinking 9 to 12 cups of fluids per day. (6)
- Light up:** During the shortest of days, going outside in the evening means going outside in the dark. Bring a headlamp to illuminate your way and wear bright, reflective clothing so that you are visible to other people and motorists.

Activity Ideas:

We all know the typical winter activities such as skating, tobogganing and skiing, but there are many other ways to play outside

in the winter. Here are three ideas for you and your students or children:

- Winter Twister:** Fill a spray bottle with water and food colouring. Using different colours, make a twister playing board on packed snow. Play!
- Snow Tic Tac Toe:** Create a tic tac toe playing board in the snow. Use 2 criss crossed sticks for X’s and pinecones for O’s. Line up 2 teams 5-10 meters away and turn it into a relay race!
- Snow Obstacle Course:** Build an obstacle course out of snow. Include jumps, tunnels, balance beams, slides and more. Time how long it takes you to get through the obstacle course and then try to beat your own time. Add new obstacles to the course next time it snows to make it more challenging!

Post Activity:

It’s okay if your favourite part of outdoor activity in the winter is coming back inside after! Brew yourself a hot drink, warm your toes in front of the fireplace or hop into the tub. Enjoy your own way of winding down after moving around in a winter wonderland. ■

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1. Alberta Health Services. “Choose Healthy Drinks.” Alberta Health Services. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 June 2017.
2. Harvard Health. “A prescription for better health: go alfresco.” Harvard Health. Harvard Medical School, July 2010. Web. 29 June 2017.
3. Gleeson, Michael. “Immune function in sport and exercise.” *Journal of Applied Physiology*. American Physiological Society, 01 Aug. 2007. Web. 29 June 2017.
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5. Puetz, Timothy W. “Physical activity and feelings of energy and fatigue: epidemiological evidence.” *Sports Medicine*, vol. 36, no. 9, 2006, p. 767+. Academic OneFile, Accessed 29 June 2017.
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The Abc’s of Playing in the Sandbox

WRITTEN BY THE ASEBP TEAM

After hearing scattered stories from wellness champions in the Alberta K-12 education system about the need and desire to collaborate, the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) and their provincial partners—Alberta Health Services, the Alberta Healthy School Community Wellness Fund, APPLE Schools, Be Fit For Life Network and Ever Active Schools—launched The Sandbox: your space for healthy school workplaces! The site provides users with a comprehensive support system, giving everyone the ability to quickly and easily collaborate with like-minded individuals and jurisdictions, have single-source access to wellness resources, get inspired by shared stories and have a space to hear about wellness events in their area. Be a superhero of workplace health and dig into The Sandbox today!

Let SCHOOL Be Your Guide

The Sandbox was built on a strong foundation—ASEBP’s very own SCHOOL model! It’s a way to guide wellness champions through the steps of developing, initiating, evaluating and maintaining a workplace wellness program. We broke it down for you and shared some of our favourite resources. Search The Sandbox—www.TheWellnessSandbox.ca—for a wealth of information to get you going at any stage of planning.

S – Structure of Leadership Support: Building a Case

Want to learn the needs specific to your workplace? Use the Idea Readiness Tool to help you assess your organization’s willingness to adopt new ideas.

C – Committee of Wellness: Creating your Dream Team

One Sandbox blogger put it best when she examined the art of participation and said, “The need for active participation in planning, executing and evaluating wellness initiatives is half the battle.”

H – Health Assessments: Setting your Sights on the Finish Line

Try a health screening assessment or interest and willingness survey at this stage. Both are great tools for learning more about your colleagues and your workplace as a whole.

O – Outline of Plan and Action: Use your Brain and Make it Rain—with Ideas

This is where you get to let loose—the idea is to think big and then rein yourself in. Whatever you do, just make sure that your goals are SMARTY ones.

O – Operation of Plan and Action: The Ins and Outs of the Day-to-Day

Your initiative is making its grand debut—congratulations! The ongoing management is still a lot of work but made easier with Sandbox resources like checklists, guidelines and posters.

L – Learning and Progressing: Livin’ and Learnin’

You did it! Now it’s time to see how you did. Dr. Jeff Johnson offers great suggestions on how to put your work to the test. Surveys are always a great tool but even something as simple as a worksheet can be enough to help you reflect, assess and evaluate your initiative and its success.

Use the SCHOOL model—and the tips and tricks available throughout The Sandbox—to make your wellness planning as easy as ABC! Since there’s room in The Sandbox for everyone, there’s no better place to connect, learn and share. ■





Photo: Students running for an Alberta Medical Association Youth Run Club Launch
Credit: Margaux McWatt

GO! Run: A Run Club Just for Girls!

SUBMITTED BY HAYLEY DEGAUST, PROVINCIAL PROJECTS COORDINATOR, EVER ACTIVE SCHOOLS

Only 8% of girls met Canadian physical activity guideline recommendations (1), so the need to increase girls' participation, competence and confidence with physical activity is very much evident. Launching in the Fall of 2017 by the Alberta Medical Association Youth Run Club, GO! Run is a girls only run club developed to foster an increase in girls' participation in physical activity! Girls will have a safe place to build their confidence & self-esteem, while focusing on fun, and age-appropriate skill development, allowing them to participate in physical activity their way.

Sarah Barton, Parent and second-year Run Club Coach at Good Shepherd School, shared her views on all-girl run clubs, including challenges, positive changes and more:

Why do you think an all-girl run club is important and why encourage girls to run?

I believe an all-girls run club gives girls a chance to succeed in a less competitive environment, than with co-ed. There is a saying "Girls need to feel good to win....Boys need to win to feel good."

I have seen the girls in this environment succeed as they are with like-minded peers and they help and encourage each

other, rather than just trying to beat the other person to win.

Have you seen positive changes in the girls since they started running?

Yes, I have seen girls who have not really participated in a physical activity before see what they are capable of doing... and doing it with a smile! The [running club] has made them see that being active is fun and it makes them healthy and feel good. The girls have made more friends and have gotten to know these girls more by spending this time together. ►

What do you think the long-term impact of this program will be to participants and the school community?

This is our 2nd year of an all-girls run club – Our first year we had 40 girls and this year we had almost 75. Some of the girls have said that running club has improved their endurance for the other sports that they play – soccer, baseball, skating.

Are there any challenges with coaching an all-girl run club?

I find girls need a bit more coaching and encouragement to keep on going. They tend to take walk breaks a little more often and longer, which is fine, but as a Coach when I am running with a group of girls, they tend to keep running for our 2-3 run time before the 1 min walk.

With a larger size, it would be good to have more adults to help keep encouraging the girls to keep on going. Once the Coach/Teacher is not around some of the girls tend to walk vs run. Guest Speakers have been a great addition to our program this year – we had a Doctor, Run Coach, Yoga Instructor, Ivivva and a Run Ambassador come to speak to the girls and they really listened to their message and enjoyed themselves.

RUNNER QUESTIONNAIRE

How does running in a girl run club make you feel?

"It makes me feel good, strong, happy and AWESOME!!!!"
"It makes me feel welcome, happy, strong and powerful!"
"1. Happy 2. Strong 3. Active 4. Healthy 5. Good about myself"
"Like I belong, happy powerful, like I can do anything!"

Would you recommend a girl run club to other schools? Why?

"Yes, because I want other girls to feel good about themselves too!"
"Yes, because not many girls get very much exercise, so it's a good thing to be doing"
"Yes, because this makes all of us feel so amazing and other schools could feel the same way we do"
"Yes, because it's really fun and other girls can have fun and stay active. Also they can meet new friends"
"Yes, because it is a great idea to allow all girls to meet and run together"

What motivates you to be healthy?

"Telling myself, 'You can do this and always have fun!'"
"All the support we are given by our teachers. I come to run club because it's good to be healthy and because it makes me very happy"

What do you think the benefits of an all-girl run club are and how have you benefitted?

"So then the boys don't think they're better than us and for girls to feel good about themselves."
"Because if there were boys it would be too much pressure and it really is fun with all girls"

Do you have tips for coaches who would like to start one?

It takes planning & commitment. Having this as a parent-volunteer led program has helped the teachers to be able to participate, but not have to plan all the other details since they are so busy.

The Teacher engagement is key – they help to keep the girls on track, lead the games and the girls like to see the teachers participate to run & walk with them.

Special thanks to the Canadian Association for the Advancements of Women and Sport and Physical Activity, and Jumpstart for support of this initiative.

Stay tuned for a GO! Run resource with warm up activities and games. Visit www.amayouthrunclub.com for updates about GO! Run and #JoinTheClub ■

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1. Canadian Health Survey 2007-2011
2. Barton, S.. 2017, June. Email interview.



School Travel Planning

WRITTEN BY: KRISTA TRIM, PRACTICUM STUDENT, EVER ACTIVE SCHOOLS

School travel planning is a comprehensive process designed to support a school community in taking ownership of Active and Safe Routes to school. Many school communities undertake the process for varying reasons, most commonly to increase safety by decreasing chaos and congestion in and around the school, reducing dangerous situation for children. Secondly, to increase active transportation methods to school, which can directly impact health and social interactions all while being environmentally and economically friendly.

A school travel plan is both a policy document and a process that results in a school-specific action plan to deal with identified challenges and to achieve stated goals, which can include but is not limited to: engineering improvement at or near schools, introduction of school resources, education, community mobilization (walking school bus, ride sharing), and encouragement (celebrations of physical activity and environment).

School travel planning brings together schools (educators, parents, students), school boards, municipalities, police, and other community members who work with a dedicated facilitator to identify and implement long-term solutions to school’s transportation.

In Alberta School Travel Planning is coordinated by SHAPE,

a non-profit organization and leader in promoting active transportation initiatives throughout the province. Through an MOU, SHAPE and EAS have aligned efforts to collectively advance school active transportation in Alberta with shared staff, resources and goals. SHAPE has resources and training to support your school community to undertake school travel planning for more information visit <https://shapeab.com/>

Join Ever Active Schools and SHAPE at the Walk21 Conference in Calgary where we will be presenting on using a Comprehensive School Health approach to School Travel Planning, along with the results from a spring survey hearing from school travel champions from across the province. <http://www.ucalgary.ca/walk21calgary> ■

Enriching Physical Activity with Mentorship

WRITTEN BY CHRIS FENLON-MACDONALD, PROVINCIAL EDUCATION COORDINATOR, EVER ACTIVE SCHOOLS

Over recent years, Ever Active Schools has been refining a Physical Literacy Mentorship initiative throughout Alberta designed to promote student well-being. This initiative is a professional learning model that provides an immersive learning experience for staff in their own school setting and community - akin to an artist-in-residence. Through the valued partnership with Jumpstart - a national charity committed to supporting local communities - this mentorship opportunity aims to enrich physical activity and opportunities throughout the school community, and across curriculum, by using a community development approach.

Over the course of the past school year, 75 health champions from over 34 school jurisdictions received customized support to initiate school-wide opportunities promoting movement-positive cultures in their school, reaching over 21,000 Alberta students. Implemented through a Comprehensive School Health approach, successful strategies included co-teaching and sharing of physical literacy enriched lesson plans; embedding physical activity in all subject areas; peer-to-peer recess initiatives, school-wide professional learning; and, being active in the surrounding community.

Trevor Henderson from West Haven School was able to “... show students the linked benefits of physical activity and healthy lifestyle choices as a means of promoting and maintaining positive mental health and wellness”, and in addition was able to “...develop positive partnerships with our parent council, our central office personnel, as well as community businesses which will undoubtedly help us facilitate future health and wellness events”.

In addition to the work inside the school, relationships with health-promoting partners, recreation centres, outdoor centres, and local experts were crucial to building the local capacity for sustained efforts and opportunities. This initiative was able to support existing, and in many cases, help create new relationships with partners such as First Nations School Authorities, the Be Fit for Life Network and Alberta Health Services - vital relationships that support wellness strategies within school jurisdictions across the province.

Why is this work so important? The more physically literate an individual is, the greater their ability to participate in a wide variety of physical activities. As physical activity is a

priority area of comprehensive school health, and knowing the broad impacts physical activity has on overall health, including mental well-being, we can quickly see the valuable role physical literacy plays in school communities. Some initial findings throughout this work indicated a need for increased confidence in enriching school environment with physical literacy concepts. A survey identified 68% of respondents (n= 396) did not feel comfortable and confident in fostering physical literacy in their teaching. 76% did not feel very comfortable and confident teaching physical education. In addition to these findings, 67% of these respondents had yet to participate in any professional learning relating to physical activity in the past school year. A final survey will be completed at the conclusion of the mentorship initiative with a goal of seeing an increase in confidence of integrating physical activity into school culture for long-term impact on health and learning outcomes of students.

“I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to lead... This has really built my self-confidence in a big way. This was an amazing chance to show that I am capable of leading, and even though it was not the biggest of crowds that I was leading, it is still a big achievement for me”.

- Grade 4 student

In the 2017-2018 school year, this initiative will rollout in several school jurisdictions across Alberta. In addition to these relationships beginning in new schools, continued support will be provided to schools recently participating in the mentorship.

If you have further questions, please contact Chris Fenlon-MacDonald, Provincial Education Coordinator: chris@everactive.org, or 403-210-6012. ■

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Parent Power: How School Councils Can Support Healthy Eating in Their School Communities (And Why They Should!)

WRITTEN BY: KERRI MURRAY, DIRECTOR OF PROJECTS, EVER ACTIVE SCHOOLS

Parents are critical actors in any school community, and having high parent engagement is a sign in and of itself that school culture is thriving. But school councils have so much potential to magnify that positive impact by creating opportunities for all members of the school community to learn about and experience healthy eating. Among their other responsibilities, school councils may be involved in organizing celebrations or appreciation events throughout the year. They might participate in canteen decisions or run hot lunch programs. Likely, they are arranging fundraisers and directing funds to support initiatives in the school. All of these activities present opportunities to reinforce healthy eating... or not.

So why should they? Or at the very least, why should it be considered? First, it aligns with a parent's interests in the school community. It would be difficult to find a school council that did not care for the well-being of students and did not have a vested interest in student success. Healthy eating prepares students to learn, positively affects mood and behavior in the classroom (and at home), assists with concentration and supports academic achievement overall.

Second, it is critical to healthy growth and development. Growing children need the right nutrients in the right amounts, at the right times to ensure optimal health. Many school councils do a wonderful job of supporting good nutrition environments already. If your school could use a nudge in this direction, here are a few simple tips to get started:

Raise the Issue

Suggest time on an agenda early in the school year to talk about the importance of healthy eating for students. This suggestion can go through the principal, chairperson or teacher representative. It is a good idea to engage the health champion

at the school, if there is one, to connect to other wellness initiatives that may already be happening.

Ask for Help

Rely on partners and subject matter experts to assist with buy-in. Some health promotion partners can do presentations to school councils on the merits of healthy eating environments. Look to schools nearby or community service providers to see what healthy options they provide.

Review Healthy School Policies

Many school jurisdictions have policies in place to guide healthy eating. This can be a good tool to gain support from school councils and ensure all members are familiar with the policies and how they can help to implement them. If no such policy exists, see the Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth for suggestions on the types of foods that can be offered in a school setting. It contains a very useful food rating system with "Choose Most Often, Choose Sometimes and ► Choose Least Often" options.

Make a Plan

Identify the opportunities the school council has to promote healthy eating throughout the year. Consider all the occasions where food is provided or served and brainstorm options and alternatives. Improving nutritional quality can be as simple as substituting whole grains for white breads at the back to school barbeque, or as complex as deciding on an alternate celebration that doesn't involve food.

The bottom line is that school councils have an important role in a healthy school community. Much like healthy eating itself, promoting healthy eating environments in schools is all about balance. Getting the message right and focusing on healthy growth and development (rather than body weight, for example), can ensure a supportive social environment, body positivity, and healthy students who are better learners. ■

DOING THIS?	TRY THIS
BACK TO SCHOOL BBQ	SUBSTITUTE WHOLE GRAIN BUNS FOR WHITE BUNS, VEGGIES AND DIP FOR CHIPS, AND WATER FOR POP
FUNDRAISERS AND BAKE SALES	FARM TO SCHOOL IS A HEALTHY CHOICE FUNDRAISER THAT SELLS FARM-FRESH VEGETABLES AT GOOD RATES TO FAMILIES FOR 50% PROFIT TO SCHOOLS
HOT LUNCH	AVOID FAST FOOD CHAINS THAT DO NOT PROVIDE 3 FOOD GROUPS AS PART OF THEIR MEALS. IDEALLY, ONE OF THOSE FOOD GROUPS SHOULD BE VEGETABLES THAT ARE NOT DEEP FRIED!
APPRECIATION EVENTS AND CELEBRATIONS	SOURCE IDEAS THAT ARE FUN AND DO NOT NECESSARILY INVOLVE FOOD, FOR EXAMPLE, FUN FIELD DAY, CONCERTS, TALENT SHOWS OR PEP RALLIES
CANTEENS OR TRUCK SHOPS	VISIT OUR ONLINE HEALTHY EATING TOOLKIT FOR AWESOME MENU IDEAS AND PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES AT HTTPS://EVERACTIVE.ORG/TOOLKIT/
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT	CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOLUNTEERS TO SOLICIT DONATIONS FROM GROCERS FOR SNACK PROGRAMS, PROVIDE PERSON-POWER TO HELP WITH LOW-FUSS BREAKFAST PROGRAMS AND MUCH MORE!
DIRECTING FUNDS	SUPPORT HEALTHY FOOD TASTE TESTERS (I.E. EAT THE RAINBOW) TO EXPOSE STUDENTS TO NEW FOODS, OFFER A SOUP AND SALAD BAR TO STAFF FOR PARENT TEACHER INTERVIEWS, SUPPORT HEALTHY OPTIONS IN SNACK AND MEAL PROGRAMS


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The Importance of Play

WRITTEN BY PIERRE HARRISON, PRESIDENT, INTERNATIONAL PLAY ASSOCIATION CANADA, FOUNDER, PLAYLEARNTHINK

“Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child’s soul.” - Friedrich Froebel, “Father of Kindergarten”

It is well established through practice and research that play is a fundamental necessity to the healthy physical and emotional development of children. So central is play to a child’s healthy development that the United Nations has declared that play is a fundamental right of the child. Play can be described as what children engage in when they choose the what, who, where and why. The child’s control is key. Through their self-directed play, children, armed with curiosity and a spirit of inquiry, explore their environment and build knowledge about the world around them. In doing so they prepare the foundation on which they will build a life of resilience, creativity, self-confidence and life-long learning.

Unfortunately, there are barriers to children’s self-directed play. The International Play Association conducted a global study on the state of play and discovered that one significant obstacle was adults’ lack of understanding of play and its role in the child’s ability to build knowledge. Other obstacles included the lack of time and space to play. Furthermore, over the past decades the push for measurable outcomes has relegated children’s free play to the sidelines. It is therefore incumbent on parents, teachers, educators, in fact all adults to ensure that children have the opportunities to engage in free, self-directed play.

Play stimulates all aspects of a child’s development such as the physical, social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual aspects and it does so in an integrated way. Traditionally, the education system has compartmentalized teaching into subject matter. The teacher will cover math, then reading, then physical education, then social studies, then science, then art, etc. When children are playing, especially in groups, they touch upon all these simultaneously. They build their social skills and physical skills as they play a game of grounders. They study materials, structures and art as they manipulate loose parts to create what they want. They discover what they can and can’t do and develop their risk recognition and assessment skills as they explore elements in their environment that take them beyond their comfort zone. They learn how to learn as they make discoveries in the world and develop theories to explain their observations. As the number of experiences they have grows, their understanding matures and they can evolve the knowledge that they create.



If play contributes to creativity, social competence, problem solving, self-confidence and innovation, it is therefore reasonable to expect that children’s self-directed play be encouraged in the school setting. Evidence from jurisdictions around the world that promote free play in schools points to an increase in happy students who are engaged in their learning. When we insert free-play opportunities and inquiry-based learning into the school curriculum, the current assessment requirements and tools will have to evolve and teachers/educators will require support and training in order to provide opportunities for the child’s learning process to be nurtured through their self-directed activities. Teachers and educators will need to hone their observation and documentation skills and use reflexive practice in order to make the child’s learning visible. It is only when we start from the child’s innate curiosity and natural drive to learn that we will be successful in guiding all children down a healthy path of self-discovery and life-long learning.

“The playing adult steps sideward into another reality; the playing child advances forward to new stages of mastery.”
– Erik H. Erikson

Learn more about the benefits of play by attending the 20th IPA Triennial World Conference in Calgary from September 13-16. Visit <https://canada2017.ipaworld.org> for more information. ■

10 Creative Ways to Develop Physical Literacy that Don’t Involve Playing Sports

WRITTEN BY THE ACTIVE FOR LIFE TEAM

“My son not only doesn’t play sports ... he doesn’t watch them either! [Gasp] I know, it’s a tragedy, right?”

In her post, “No, My Son Doesn’t Play Sports ... Really, It’s OK!” Kerry Forman — mom, psychotherapist, writer, and speaker — writes about the cultural expectation for boys to play sports. And she describes how she receives a lot of negative comments from other parents because her son doesn’t. But she’s absolutely right. It’s totally okay that her son doesn’t play sports.

While every child should have the opportunity to develop physical literacy, that doesn’t mean everyone has to do so by playing sports. Physical literacy is more than just sports. It’s about being confident in any kind of physical activity — including things such as dance, parkour, skateboarding, and more.

Having said that, if your son — or daughter, for that matter — says they don’t like sports, it is possible they just haven’t found one that they enjoy yet. So why not introduce them to many different activities and ask them what they like and why?

Do they shy away from competition? Are they worried about letting down a team? They could be missing out on developing skills away from sports that would give them more confidence and enjoyment.

We tend to think narrowly when it comes to boys and their activities. Not every boy will want to play hockey, soccer, or baseball. Maybe he’d like to try fencing, diving, dancing, or gymnastics. The options are only limited by our imaginations.

Here are 10 ways kids can be active, develop skills, and have fun without playing sports

1. DrumFIT

2. Biking or Fat Biking
3. Nature photography
4. Parkour
5. Hiking
6. Theatre (for babies right on up)
7. Trampolining
8. Circus school (even toddlers can participate)
9. Geocaching
10. Yoga

Bonus suggestions: Dance is amazing for boys but we didn’t put it on the list because we consider it a sport as well as an art. But if your son isn’t interested in team sports, he may love hip hop, jazz, or ballet.

When looking for activities for your children, be creative and follow their lead. With enough space and time, they’ll show you how they love to move. For example, if your child is climbing the walls at home, it may be time to check out the local climbing gym.

For more great articles surrounding physical literacy, please visit: <http://activeforlife.com> ■





Photos: Grade 6 Bike Mechanics from Tsuut'ina Middle School problem solve together on a team bike ride. Fixing bikes allows the students to redirect their energy when they can't focus in class
Credit: Emily Parkin

Bike Program Builds Leadership, Confidence and Resiliency

WRITTEN BY MARGAUX MCWATT, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR & MELISSA TIERNEY, RESILIENCY COORDINATOR, EVER ACTIVE SCHOOLS

“The program offers the students an opportunity to enhance their learning and be productive in a meaningful and engaging way,” said Emily Parkin, teacher at Tsuut’ina Middle School. The program she was referring to is a new behaviour intervention program. Students who struggle in a traditional classroom setting, and who are all kinesthetic learners, are able to step away from a traditional setting to build, fix and repair bicycles within the school day.

The program began on May 25th, 2017, when Two Wheel View came to Tsuut’ina Middle School to introduce bike mechanics. Two Wheel View, based in Calgary, AB, is an organization that creates opportunities for young people to learn and practice lessons in leadership, health and wellness, self esteem, achievement, and environmental stewardship through their participation in bicycle education programs and trips.

Having known the organization for their capacity for using bikes to build resiliency, confidence and success within First Nations students, Emily explained that she approached them to engage five kinaesthetic learners in a bike mechanics lesson. Two employees came out for an afternoon, and led an activity where the students were able to strip parts and components off of bikes while they problem solved, collaborated, focused and supported each other.

Having worked incredibly hard fixing the bikes, the mechanics sessions led to bike riding lessons, which was a positive way for the students to channel their excess energy into meaningful physical activity, Emily explained. She noted that other impacts of the program include gaining respect for self and others, as they require the

support of teachers and staff to continue to build this program. Many of the students chosen for this program, possess the skills, patience, problem-solving and determination to become bike mechanics (was not a prerequisite of being chosen), so they now have this opportunity to continue to master these skills.

“The full impact of this remains to be seen, however, in four weeks we have noticed a sense of pride to belong to this program. They are gaining a sense of autonomy in asking their classroom teacher if they can work on bikes (often the students come out in various combinations throughout the day),” Emily said.

Through a grant, Tsuut’ina Middle School was able to purchase a complete set of shop tools and bicycle stands to keep at the school and implement this program, along with a number of donated bikes from Two Wheel View, including a specific bike for each of the students to keep upon completion.

“Our plan for next year, is to continue to build on the leadership, confidence and resiliency of these five students in addition to having them become our student leaders for a school wide launch of the bike program,” said Emily. ■

Going the Distance: Walking to the Philippines

WRITTEN BY DOLORES ANDRESEN, GRADE TWO/THREE TEACHER, BERTHA KENNEDY CATHOLIC SCHOOL



Photo: BK students celebrating their completed walk
Credit: Dolores Andresen

We did it! After months of walking, running and adding up our kilometres, we finally made it to Tacloban in the Philippines. Since September 2016, the whole Bertha Kennedy (BK) Elementary School community has walked from St. Albert to the Philippines—a distance of 10, 965 kilometres!

The participation varied from week to week, often around 35 - 40 students. All students from K-6 were able to participate. On indoor recess days, we walked inside the school. Many grades also tracked their gym laps and our running club and RunWild runners also contributed their mileage. Bertha Kennedy was the only school doing this ‘walk’ however all schools in the district have been contributing to the building of Pope Francis school through various fundraising initiatives.

One late spring morning, students, staff and guests met in the BK gym for a brief rally before heading out as a large group to walk the final 250 kilometres around the perimeter of our schoolyard.

Cathy Traynor, teacher and one of the organizers said, “This project has reminded us that the habit of daily exercise is a lifelong activity.” The Healthy BobKat student leadership team from Grade 5 led the walk, followed by our BK students who have a personal connection to the Philippines, many having moved to St. Albert in the past year.

After Typhoon Hanna hit the Philippines in 2015, Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools decided to build a school in Tacloban, an area that was hardest hit. Our school as well as other schools in the Division have been fundraising for 2 years to help build Pope Francis School. Our superintendent, who joined in our walk, showed us photos of Pope Francis School and the surrounding area. We included slides of our own BK students from the Philippines and some of their personal photos from their homeland. The community building that we did with our BK Filipino students was a side benefit that we hadn’t

anticipated. In learning about the Philippines, our students were able to be more welcoming to our new Filipino families. So that builds on the positive social-emotional environment that Cathy mentioned as the students from the Philippines and their families felt appreciated.

Any cultural celebration includes food, so after one of our BK caretakers led us in Grace in Tagalog, the native language of the Philippines, we were treated to a huge sampling of the foods prepared for us by our BK Filipino families. It was a great way to celebrate the completion of a huge undertaking. This project was multifaceted because it touched on so many of our school priorities: the social justice project of Pope Francis School, the community building with the BK students from the Philippines, and of course the lifelong activity of walking for fitness and health.

We definitely would encourage other schools to plan a similar event. This is our second time having a specific goal destination to encourage students to walk - we ‘walked’ across Canada a few years ago. Not only does this type of activity promote active living, it also promotes cross graded participation and helps to build a positive social-emotional environment through working together to achieve a common goal. This walk also was an opportunity for service to others which is an important aspect of citizenship which is fostered at BK. That seems to be the way with these events. They start as a single activity but then we begin making connections to other groups, themes, events, and projects.

This started as a walking club, which is such a basic lifelong form of exercise, but expanded from a physical activity to also include social justice, community building, cultural awareness, and school spirit.

That would be the suggestion to other schools: choose an activity that fits with the school goals and expand the connections from there.

Way to go, BobKats! ■



Champions for Health and Physical Education

“The Health and Physical Education Council (HPEC), of the Alberta Teacher’s Association, provides instruction and programs in health and physical education to promote the development of healthy active lifestyles in students. As a professional organization of teachers, we advocate for quality health and physical education programs and provide opportunities for professional growth and development of our members. Examples of these opportunities include, resource development, regional HPEC Drive-in Workshops and our Annual HPEC Conference which will be held in Calgary this year. To find more information, to become an HPEC Member, or to contact the HPEC Regional Representative in your area, check out our Website | www.hpec.ab.ca Twitter | @albertahpec; or Facebook | HPEC - Health and Physical Education Council Alberta Teachers Association.”

Meet an Inspiring Teacher, and council member for over 17 years: Heather Rootsart

1. When, and why did you join HPEC?

I was invited to become the Edmonton Regional Representative back in January 1998 when my friend Brent Hamilton knew he was leaving the position to go teach abroad; I haven’t looked back since serving on the executive for the next 17yrs for Physical and Health Education Canada (PHEC), President Elect, President & Past President up until May 2015 when I stepped down until May 2017 when I was asked to rejoin the executive as the Alberta Schools’ Athletic Association liaison.

2. What sparked your interest in Health and Physical Education?

I have always been active in and out of school playing school sports throughout junior and senior high and even more so as an adult and now as a mother with a family with three school-aged children. I was always puzzled to see several girls my age, especially in junior high, not wanting or having to participate in PE at school. I grew up with an older brother (and sister) and very few neighbourhood girls so I played football, soccer, baseball, trail riding (Dukes of Hazard!), etc... with all the boys and I loved it and I didn’t understand why so many of my friends didn’t.

3. What is the most rewarding aspect of being a member of HPEC?

100% the relationships that I have made that have led to amazing professional AND personal life-long connections! I am SO blessed by the friendships I have made over all these years, provincially and nationally! In addition, the fact that my husband, Dean, is also a Phys. Ed. Teacher who sat on HPEC in various positions on the executive is a bonus! I LOVE that our three children get to witness our ability to work together (we have co-chaired two HPEC conferences together), our love of being active and the friendships we have made with likeminded, strong people across the province.

4. What is the best advice you’ve received? Who gave it to you?, and How is it applied in your teaching?

This is a tough one b/c there are so many people who have touched my career! Some of the BEST advice, not so much that I have heard, per se, but that I have witnessed for sure, from leaders before me, was their perseverance and commitment in making health and physical education better for ALL children and youth. We still have a lot of work to do but when I watch the “blood, sweat & tears” that some of the ‘greats’ in our field have poured into their programs/organizations despite the resistance or lack of support we sometimes face in health and physical education, I am inspired and truly hopeful! There are honestly too many to mention and I would hate to leave anyone out but I can say that most of them have sat around the HPEC and/or PHEC table(s) at one point of another or maybe they are sitting there now and they should know who they are. One recent & specific piece of advice that was not new to me but it was timely so it really resonated with me was at one of my district’s PD days this past February 2017. The speaker, David Wells from Plymouth, actually paraphrased some words from Pope Francis. In a nutshell, he spoke about “not letting others rob you of the following things: enthusiasm, joy, hope, community...”. I try to live this every day and hearing it recently only validated why I choose to be who I am and why I do what I do. I try to apply what I have learned from the aforementioned ‘greats’ in ALL that I do, not only in teaching but in all aspects of my life! I will NOT give up on fighting for ALL kids to have positive experiences in physical education (& health) which means I will continue to align myself with my ‘good vibe tribe’ of fellow advocates.

**To read full interview, please visit: <http://bit.ly/2ej3dVX> ■*



Professional Learning Opportunities for School Wellness

WRITTEN BY CHRIS FENLON-MACDONALD, PROVINCIAL EDUCATION COORDINATOR, EVER ACTIVE SCHOOLS

You have likely heard the quote, ‘it takes a village to raise a child,’ similarly, we know it takes a whole school community to support the growth and development of its students. One way Ever Active Schools works to support the growth and development of Alberta students is by offering competency focused professional learning opportunities to schools, districts and community partners. We recognize the education field is dynamic and being aware of new developments and changes to the field, is a professional responsibility that school communities strive to stay abreast of.

Through the hundreds of professional learning opportunities delivered this past year, and the thousands of participants reached, we’ve managed to receive some notable feedback. In particular a few highlights:

- 83% of those participating in Ever Active Schools professional learning indicate that their participation in the learning allowed them to identify and form new partnerships, collaborations opportunity and to create support networks for their practice.
- 97% of participants noted that the professional learning they attended contributed to deeper understanding of student wellbeing in school communities
- 93% of participants said they would be able to use the knowledge gained immediately following the professional learning opportunity

Additionally, 93% of participants noted that the information shared was going to impact student health and learning outcomes

In the 2017-2018 school year, Ever Active Schools has developed new, evidence-based, and active professional learning to support schools in a variety of areas such as physical activity, outdoor education, mental well-being, active living and more.

We would like to invite you to connect with us to learn more or check out <https://www.everactive.org/plos> to browse an array of professional learning. Still can’t find what you are looking for? Let us know and we’d be happy to discuss how we can build professional learning to suit your specific needs or recommend a trusted provincial partner who may be better able to support you. ■

TESTIMONIALS

“It was fantastic. Hands on, active and relevant to my classroom.”

“A very relevant session to attend when dealing about the mental health of children, since getting them active directly relates to their mental wellness too.”

“Very practical and positive experience. I particularly like how they focus on belonging and whole student development as portrayed in the circle of courage.”

“It was fantastic to see so many passionate people from various sectors of health and wellness brought together to one place. I think this collaboration is essential.”

LOW COST / LESS COMPETITIVE / FAMILY INVOLVEMENT / COMPLEMENTARY TO ORGANIZED SPORT / SAFETY / MANAGEABLE TIME COMMITMENT/ SKILL DEVELOPMENT / FAIR PLAY/ HEALTHY LIFESTYLE PROMOTION

UNIQUENESS AND PRINCIPLES

FUNTEAM

YOUNG LEADERS PROGRAM

FunTeam Young Leaders began in 2014 as a program to offer leadership opportunities for young leaders in our community. The main objectives of this program are to: empower youth to develop & utilize leadership skills, offer complimentary programs promoting physical activity for younger children, and offering financial assistance to school programs. FYLP is open to any young leader(s) interested in the program. Young adults will organize, promote and run a FunTeam sporting activity with a group of children in their community for a 6-10 week period (minimum of 12 sessions). The school/community group is required to provide a mentor to supervise all activities. Leaders are given the freedom to develop the program as they wish, keeping in mind the principles of FunTeam Alberta. Upon completion of the program, the school/community group will be awarded with a \$1000 honorarium and participants will receive personalized certificates and medals. If you are interested in recommending a young leader in your community, please contact **Gabriela** at admin@funteamalberta.com



Social & Emotional Well-being Lesson Plan: 5 Alive

CREATED BY JACQUI CURRIE, HEALTH PROMOTIONS COORDINATOR, ALBERTA HEALTH SERVICES

Objective: To give students an opportunity to participate in fun, engaging activities that will teach them about the dimensions of wellness: social, physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual.

- **Emotional wellness** is acknowledging, understanding, managing and expressing thoughts and feelings in a constructive manner
- **Intellectual wellness** is the development and the critical and creative use of the mind to its fullest potential
- **Physical wellness** is the ability, motivation and confidence to move effectively and efficiently in a variety of situations, and the healthy growth, development, nutrition and care of the body.
- **Social wellness** is relating positively to others and is influenced by many factors including how individuals communicate, establish and maintain relationships, are treated by others and interpret that treatment.
- **Spiritual wellness** is an understanding of one's own values and beliefs leading to a sense of meaning or purpose and a relationship to the community

Master Equipment List:

Signs with the dimensions of wellness written on them, 5 easy to draw pictures (Appendix A), 6 clipboards, coloured straws, paper and pencils, flip chart, 6 sets of paddles with emoji faces (Appendix B), list of scenarios (Appendix C), paper with 1-10 listed on it, 10 wuzzles (Appendix D), tape, colouring books, crayons, tent, sheets, yoga mats

Introduction/Set-up (5-10mins):

- Set-up the gym with 5 stations labelled with each dimension (can be modified to fit a classroom)
- Handout a straw/student as they come in to the gym to create groups (you will need 30 straws in total (5 different colours, 6 of each colour)
- Introduce yourself and briefly explain each station (listed below)
- Students will be at each stations for 5-10min depending on the time available
- Approximately 5-6 kids/station

Station 1: Social Wellness

This station will be a listening and communicating station. The goal of the station is to emphasize the importance of listening to what others say and also to find ways to communicate so that others understand you. Facilitators will explain that listening and communicating is a necessary skill for healthy social settings and relationships.

Equipment:

1. Easy to draw pictures (appendix A)
2. Paper, pencils and clip boards

Instructions:

- One student will be given a picture that they need to describe to all the other students how to draw it, without letting them see it. They have to explain how to draw it without telling them what it is. (see appendix A for picture ideas).
- After the student is done describing the picture the group will look at the completed pictures and discuss how the leader did as a communicator and how they did as a listeners.
- Rotate the leaders to give multiple students a chance to be the communicator ▶

Station 2: Emotional Wellness

This station will be about understanding and showing emotions. The facilitator will explain how it is important to recognize our own emotions and those around us by being aware of facial expressions and non-verbal cues.

Equipment:

1. 6 sets of emoji paddles (see appendix B)
2. List of scenarios (see appendix B)

Instructions:

- Students will be given a set of emoji paddles with different expressions on them (angry, sad, happy, scared, etc...). The leader will read out a scenario and the students will put up the paddle for the expression they would feel in that scenario.
- After each scenario the leader will have a quick conversation about why the students picked that paddle and why they think the emoji shows that feeling.
- Throughout the activity the facilitator will have conversations about how different situations cause different reactions for people and how emoji's are often misused and misunderstood in written communication causing some miscommunication.

Station 3: Physical Wellness

This station will be about getting a little active and having some fun! The facilitator will explain the importance of physical health and movement to stay healthy and happy!

Equipment:

1. 5-6 chairs set-up in a large circle

Instructions:

- The student will play the game Fruit Basket! The students need to sit on the chairs with one person standing without a chair (the facilitator could be the person starting). The standing student says something and if it applies to anyone on a chair they have to run to an open chair (i.e. I like bananas, I love the game monopoly, etc...)
- The last person standing is now the caller

Station 4: Intellectual Wellness

This station is about getting students thinking and using their neocortex! The facilitator will explain the importance of learning

new things to maintain a healthy, happy brain!

Equipment:

1. Paper with 1-10 written on it
2. Pencils
3. 10 wuzzles and tape

Instructions:

- The students will each be given a piece of paper with the numbers 1-10 written on it. They will go around and look at a set of 10 wuzzles and try to solve them (see appendix C)
- The facilitator will decide if they can work on them together based on how they are doing individually.

Station 5: Spiritual Wellness

This station will be about giving students 5-10 minutes to decompress and do something relaxing. Facilitators will explain the importance of taking time throughout the day for quiet activities to give ourselves an opportunity to decompress and reboot.

Equipment:

1. Sheets
2. Mats
3. Colouring books and markers
4. Possibly a small tent

Instructions:

- In a quiet area of the gym (possibly the stage) set up six different stations with a mat, colouring book, markers. If available set up tables and cover each area with a fitted sheet to create more privacy.
- Students will quietly colour or lie still for 5-10mins in their own space. This is a SILENT activity and students are expected to stay in their space not talking or engaging with others.

Wrap-Up:

- Facilitators will do a quick wrap up explaining the 5 dimensions of wellness and get feed-back from students on what they liked and what they might have struggled with.

*To download the full lesson plan, please visit:
<http://bit.ly/2twDhU5> ■

Don't Sit Still in Class!

Ever Active Schools has been working with teachers across the province to create a new resource called, "Don't Sit Still in Class: Move your Body, Grow Your Brain". This resource is a part of our 21st Century Spaces for 21st Century Learners Initiative. In the summer of 2016, we brought educators together from across the province to workshop ideas for making over classroom spaces. The groups developed shopping lists, floor plans, and brainstormed modifications for traditional classroom furniture to decrease sedentary behaviour. A special thanks to Jody Harding-Kuriger and Jonathan Mauro for supporting the development of the draft of this resource.

However, we need to hear from you! Before launching the resource, we want more stories from those who've already made modifications to their classrooms. How do you instruct in these new modified spaces? What strategies, and tips do you have for others? Making the modifications is only step 1. Step 2 is knowing how to you instruct in this new, non traditional space. Perhaps you team teach and swap with another teacher, one class has desks the other doesn't, perhaps you have outdoor equipment bins for when you take your classroom outside.

Share your instructional strategies in a modified or outdoor classroom, connect with Louise McClelland:
louise@everactive.org

In the meantime check out this amazing resource, which highlights some of these modifications schools can make to increase physical activity. The resource is called "Physical Activity Design Guidelines For School Architecture." https://issuu.com/vmdoarchitects/docs/buckingham_physical_activity_design ■



Photos: Nya & Nate Ffoulkes-Jones, Elijah McWatt & Covell Woolery enjoying unstructured play
Credit: Margaux McWatt

★ FEATURE STORY

Recess: Taking a Break to Foster Overall Health

WRITTEN BY MARGAUX MCWATT, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR, EVER ACTIVE SCHOOLS

Imagine school days without any free, unstructured play... What would this look like in the long-term for student well-being and the overall health of school communities? Imagine no organic opportunities for students to experience positive play and physical activity, to build relationships, to settle conflicts and to feel a sense of autonomy and freedom in an environment with their peers. Because children and youth spend a large part of their day at school, schools have a unique chance to create an environment of wellness, but 31% of Canadian Schools don't have a policy concerning daily physical activity periods for students (4), which may leave the time dedicated to recess expendable in order to focus on other areas that are perceived to be of more value. Students experience those organic opportunities to grow and learn during recess, but without policies in place for some Canadian schools, will the amount and quality of recess in Canadian schools start to diminish?

Time dedicated to this active break is proving to be incredibly beneficial in several studies, articles, new resources and movements. But before we explore the benefits, what are some opposing views? And how do they stand up to the mounting evidence supporting these active breaks?

Three main arguments opposing the need for recess and free play include academics, liability and safety: shortening or eliminating recess to provide extra time spent in the classroom for academic performance; unstructured, free play can lead to injuries, be too risky, and welcome conflict with unsupervised activities (7). These concerns are valid, worth being explored and all have solid counter-arguments and solutions from various voices.

"The American Academy of Pediatrics stats that recess is a crucial and necessary component of a child's development and, as such, it should not be withheld for punitive or academic reasons (3)." Along with developing cognitive understanding through exploratory experiences, recess has been shown to make students more attentive and productive in the classroom (3). In an academic paper published by Active Living Research, it is stated that "Regular participation in physical activity and higher levels of physical fitness have been linked to improved academic performance and brain functions, such as attention and memory. These brain functions are the foundation for learning (1)." Academically,

it's more beneficial to give students an active break so they can return to the classroom ready, refreshed and eager to retain information, rather than removing the opportunity altogether.

Liability and safety during recess are aspects that always need to be considered, but they shouldn't be road blocks to adventurous and unstructured play. A Stanford University study on recess revealed that proper supervision, planning, guidelines and an inclusive environment all contribute to students feeling safe to participate in recess. "Students in schools with well-run and well-organized recesses feel better, safer and more engaged, which in turn was associated with improvements in overall school climate. Teachers began to more highly appreciate the importance of recess time (9)." Acknowledging safety and adventurous play, and putting guidelines in place to ensure students can participate in unstructured play harmlessly opens the door to countless benefits: "Through play at recess, children learn valuable communication skills, including negotiation, cooperation, sharing, and problem solving as well as coping skills, such as perseverance and self control. These skills become fundamental, lifelong personal tools (8)."

Rachelle Fairs, grade 6-9 teacher at Chamberlain School has a similar case for recess: "I think it is important to have a brain break for the students and allow

“

I like the idea of students being able to play in a variety of spaces and to not be restricted by boundary rules. Play allows us to connect and explore, it also increases our positive feelings!"

- Joseph Dumant, Principal at Holy Redeemer Catholic School



them some time outside in the fresh air. I also think that many life skills are taught in a less structured environment than a classroom. Skills like conflict management between friends and imagination through play," she said. Her students enjoy two 15-minute breaks during the day, playing with a new resource from Be Fit For Life called Move & Play at Recess, which uses painted lines on playground tarmacs to increase physical activity.

Beyond the benefits of physical activity, communication and cognitive development that recess promotes, it also promotes play, which has a major role in the wellbeing of children and youth; check out "The Importance of Play" article on page 12.

"I like the idea of students being able to play in a variety of spaces and to not be restricted by boundary rules. Play allows us to connect and explore, it also increases our positive feelings!" said Joseph Dumont, educator of 17 years. With his current role as Principal at Holy Redeemer Catholic School, he explained that he loves joining in on the fun at recess, which is enjoyed twice a day with a 15 minute break in the morning, then 35 minutes at lunch. Students at Holy Redeemer partake in sports, games in the park and animated play. "[I'll jump in] and just start animated play (pretending we are on a distant planet and need to escape some crazy aliens!) It is very fun, but can get a little crazy with big groups of students. I have had lots of experience with animated play from my previous experience in summer programs, and I think it is a blast," he said.

While Joseph is happy with the quality and amount of recess at his school, he did acknowledge that some countries dedicate more time to free play and are benefitting immensely from it. "If you look at the Finnish model, they will break for recess every hour and outperform the US academically by large margins. So, from an academic perspective as well as health and wellness, it likely is not a positive decision [to scale down or cut out recess]," he said. Finland does have a unique break system where schools break for 15 minutes after every 45 minutes of instruction (2). Shortening classroom instruction is reinforced by the outcome: the hourly breaks maximize learning with the students feeling energized and attentive upon return to the classroom (2). On the opposite side of the spectrum, there have been some places that have scaled back or removed recess altogether, only to receive opposition, prompting new legislation: "After years of complaints from parents and teachers, Florida lawmakers appear ready to approve a sweeping education bill that would mandate recess in elementary schools (9)." Diminishing time for free play has also sparked movements and new resources supporting recess:

PHE America has a new resource including step-by-step guides with evidence-based strategies for all K-12 students. Learn more here: <http://www.pheamerica.org/2017/school-recess-gets-a-leg-up-with-newly-released->

resources/

The Recess Project is striving to re-think recess, designing it with children in mind, including research on play, friendships, leadership, compassion & empathy & much more. Learn more here: <http://www.recessprojectcanada.com/rethinking-recess.html>

Peaceful Playgrounds' Right to Recess Campaign advocates saving school recess, which is backed up by research, testimonials and a toolkit package. Learn more here: <http://peacefulplaygrounds.com/right-to-recess-campaign/>

Regardless of the duration or structure, the significance of recess and its implications are tough to deny: It's a necessary break in a student's day for advancing physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Stay tuned for new recess resources from Ever Active Schools, supporting play, inclusive environments and physical literacy. ■

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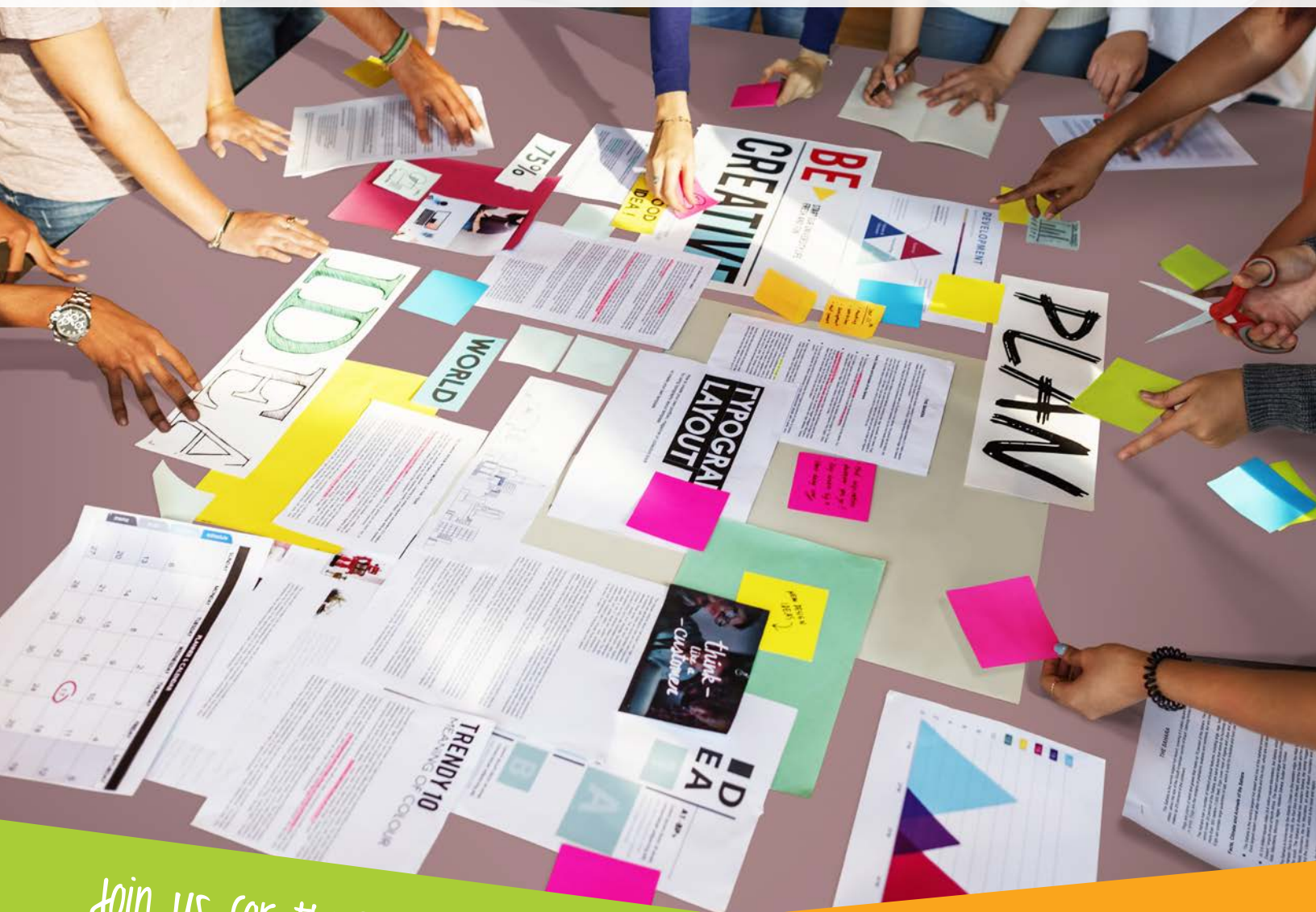


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