

PRIORITIZING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

How can schools and families encourage physical activity over the summer?

Physical activity is important for adults and children alike. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [participation in regular movement opportunities](#) can help children build strong bones and muscles, maintain optimal weight and reduce the risk of developing serious health conditions like cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure and more. Physical activity also supports learning and is a great way for families to connect and spend time together. However, prior to the pandemic, [Oklahoma ranked second in the nation in physical inactivity among adults](#). With only [24% of children](#) age 6-17 getting the recommended 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity and the COVID-19 pandemic reducing [physical activity by as much as 32%](#), it is increasingly important that families and schools ensure children receive at least an hour of physical activity daily.

The information in this document was developed to provide guidance to families and schools on how to ensure children receive optimal levels of daily physical activity in the summer to jumpstart physical fitness levels for personal well-being and academic success.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

There is broad understanding of physical activity's impact on physical well-being. Physical activity also has positive effects on intellectual, mental, social and emotional health. [Physical activity helps children get along better, decreases behavior issues, increases academic performance ratings and reduces anxiety, stress and depression.](#)

[Numerous research studies show children who are physically active experience health and academic benefits.](#) Students who participate in sports or athletics have a foundation

for physical activity through practice and competition. But many children do not participate in organized sports, and of those who do, few compete year-round.

Families and summer learning programs can engage kids in physical activity by encouraging walks, yoga, park visits, bike rides, swimming, dancing, skating and other activities. Schools and families can also consult virtual physical activity resources from [PBS](#) and the [Pacific Institute for Sport Excellence \(PISE\)](#).

KEY INSIGHTS

- Provide multiple opportunities for physical activity throughout the day to help children attain the recommended 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity.
- Physical activity can help alleviate stress, anxiety and depression, which is particularly important for children whose emotional or mental health suffered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Provide a variety of physical activity opportunities to increase enjoyment and engagement.
- Remove barriers for access to physical activities by providing safe, alternative equipment options.
- Provide physical activity opportunities that give kids choice, variety and modifications.

SEE ALSO

- How can social and emotional learning and mental health supports be incorporated into summer learning?
- How can summer enrichment experiences support student learning, well-being and success?
- How can student learning be supported at home during the summer?

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

Children can be sensitive about perceived physical shortcomings or lack of ability. Not all kids are, or need to be, athletes. It is important to offer a variety of options to get kids moving and emphasize that developing healthy habits while having fun is more important than “winning.” Engagement in all types of physical activity helps children develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to learn to develop healthy habits that can benefit them for a lifetime.

Physical activity doesn’t necessarily require expensive equipment. Safe and easy alternative materials are available at home or in the classroom. Gopher Sports’ [At-Home Equipment Replacement List](#) is a great place to start.

In areas where barriers to physical activity opportunities exist, community-based organizations (e.g., YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc.), local and [state parks](#), recreation centers, local colleges, [21st Century Learning Centers](#) and tribal agencies offer strong summer programs.

Historically, females of all ages report lower rates of participation in physical activities and sports, and [recent trends indicate that the gap is widening](#). Reversing these trends will require intentional, targeted approaches to overcome current barriers (e.g., [social stigma, lack of role models, types of activities available, etc.](#)).

To address these barriers, families and schools can emphasize the importance of fun, health and social interaction in sports participation. Also, local physical activity programs and community partners such as The [Oklahoma City Police Athletic League \(OKC PAL\)](#), [First Serve OKC](#), [Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation](#) and the [Girls on the Run](#) program provide a wide variety of physical activities for girls to find enjoyment, satisfaction and success in movement opportunities.

RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

- Explore [Oklahoma’s outdoor adventures](#) like hiking and biking paths as a family or find adrenaline-pumping activities like kayaking or zip-lining.
- Use the [Playworks Play at Home Playbook](#) to assist in thinking through, planning for and making physical activity engaging and enjoyable for students, families and teachers.
- The [Online Physical Education Network’s \(OPEN\) Tools for Creating an Active Home](#) include impactful summer physical activity experiences, including social and emotional journals; physical activity logs; dance and yoga videos; High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) and other short, intense fitness routines; and active fun for families.
- [Rep It Out!](#) includes approximately 100 physical activity ideas for specific grade bands (K-2nd, 3rd-5th and 6th-8th) that can be implemented in a variety of settings.