

NEWS RELEASE

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NH Schools Must Recommend Daily Physical Activity

Last spring, a new state rule to support daily physical activity was finalized (Ed 310). As a result, each local school board must adopt a written policy about developmentally appropriate physical activities and exercise. This policy shall recommend that all students in elementary school through high school (and suggests all staff at the schools) participate in developmentally appropriate physical activity and exercise for a minimum of 30 to 60 minutes each day. The school board must recommend that all the public schools in the school district implement the policy. The policy shall be communicated to students, staff, and parents. A complete copy of the rule can be found at <http://www.ed.state.nh.us/education/laws/ed310.htm> (see components below).

Physically active students come to school more ready to learn and are more likely to achieve their academic potential. Emphasis on physical activity in school children can help build lifetime health, mental health, and social well-being and prevent adverse health consequences that include childhood obesity, cardiovascular disease, stroke, osteoporosis, and Type 2 Diabetes.

This law was created because of the strong relationship between physical activity and academic achievement, as well as because of the concern about childhood obesity. However, children are spending less time being active and more time being sedentary and rates of overweight in children have tripled in the last 30 years. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that if current trends continue, over one-third of the children born in the year 2000 will go on to develop diabetes (K.M. Venkat Narayan, MD, Chief of the Diabetes Epidemiology Section, Center for Disease Control and Prevention). We know that 70% of overweight children will become obese adults, many of whom will

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suffer from heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers because of their weight. There is now emerging research that, if current trends continue, today's children will have shorter and less healthy lives than their parents due to obesity and lack of physical activity.

Clearly, the issue of childhood obesity is closely associated with both nutrition and physical activity. Overall, schools in NH should be praised for their efforts to improve nutrition. It is now becoming socially unacceptable to have vending machines in schools with soda and junk food in them. Many schools are offering additional choices of fruits and vegetables, including fresh items on their menus, and this is a very noteworthy change. Some schools are beginning to introduce a variety of whole grain products in their lunch menus, but finding economical ways to do this continues to be a challenge statewide. Eating contests, which were often a highlight of school events in years past, are sensibly being replaced by more appropriate alternatives. In some schools, it is also socially unacceptable to be using food as a reward or to take away recess as a consequence for inappropriate behavior, but in many others these practices continue.

(see NH Dept of Ed Key Messages: Constructive Classroom Rewards:

<http://www.ed.state.nh.us/education/News/june05.htm> to learn more about these issues).

School nurses, food service directors and staff, health educators, and physical educators are health resources in our schools. They are deeply concerned about the health of the children they see everyday. Many have taken leadership roles by creating walking programs in some schools, encouraging children to walk to school, engaging in teaching including nutrition and physical activity, creating school vegetable gardens, sharing written materials with students and families, collaborating with local community programs to support after school physical activities, and partnering with colleagues to create healthier school environments.

It is now our hope that school health professionals will join with school administrators and assist in implementing this new rule to create meaningful policies that promote physical activity within their districts and schools. If you have further questions, please address them to:

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Cheri White, MS, School Food Nutrition Services, 271-3646 or email: cwhite@ed.state.nh.us.

Components of the Policy

The developmentally appropriate daily physical activity policy shall include, but not be limited to the following practices, which:

- (1) Encourage parents and guardians to support their children's participation in enjoyable physical activities, and recognize that parents and guardians act as role models for active lifestyles;
- (2) Support special programs such as student and staff walking programs, family fitness events, and events that emphasize life-long physical activity;
- (3) Integrate health and physical activity across the school curriculum;
- (4) Encourage student-initiated activities that promote inclusive physical activity on a school-wide basis;
- (5) Commit adequate resources that include program funding, personnel, safe equipment, and facilities;
- (6) Provide professional development opportunities for all school staff that will assist them to effectively promote enjoyable and lifelong physical activity among youth, and that will assist school staff to recognize their influence as role models for active lifestyles;
- (7) Establish relationships with community recreation and youth sports programs and agencies to coordinate and complement physical activity programs;
- (8) Encourage physical activity recess periods; and
- (9) Institute a tracking and evaluation method to ensure that all students are engaging in developmentally appropriate daily physical activity.