

Active Schools

Active Schools Implementation Guide

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UNIVERSITY OF
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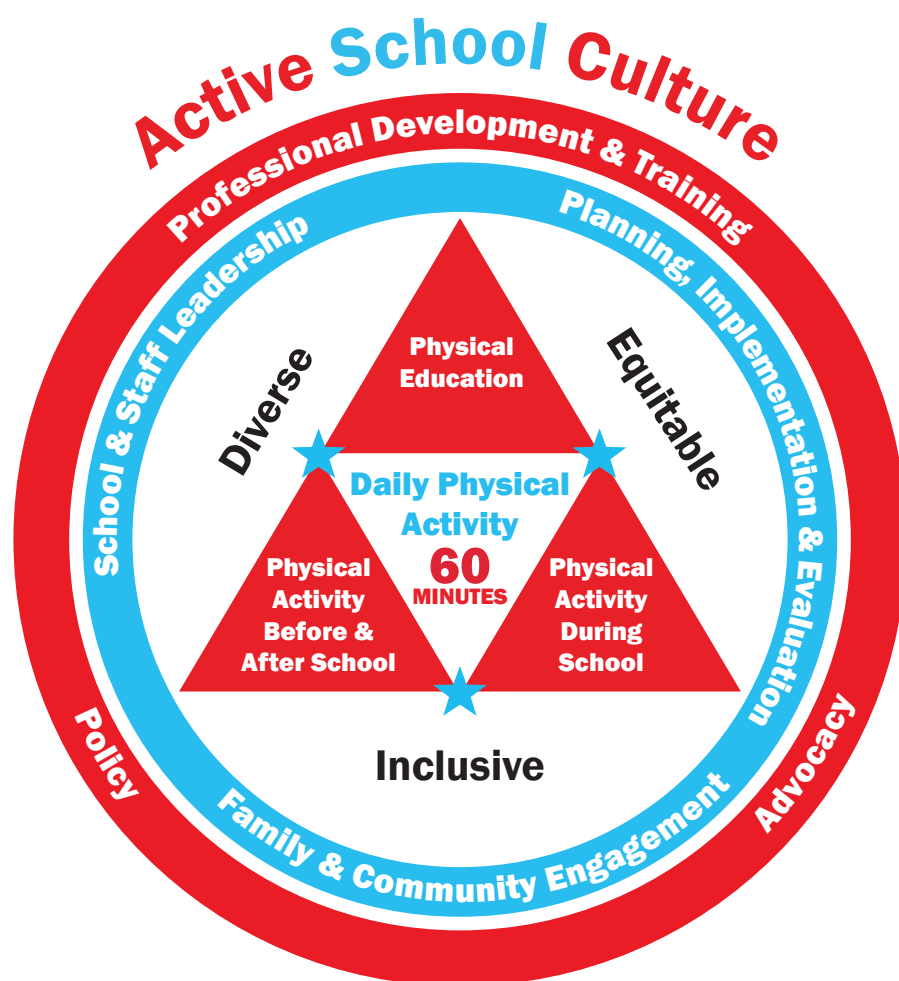
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Active Schools Implementation Guide

Introduction and Intended Use

This guide is designed to provide school communities with strategies that can be used to implement the essential elements of an active school culture. A brief introduction and rationale for each element is provided, along with a sample of evidence-based practices, suggestions for successful implementation, and helpful tools and resources.

Essential Elements of an Active School Culture



Schools can use this document as a catalyst for effective implementation within their own context. We acknowledge that schools do not operate on a one-size-fits-all basis, therefore school personnel and members of the broader school community are encouraged to modify the strategies presented in this document as needed to fit their unique context. All strategies and tools provided in this document and the accompanying Menus of Evidence-Based Practices were compiled by considering research related to each element (see Active Schools Guiding Framework), and therefore can be considered evidence-based practices. From an equity perspective, it is important that all schools are able to pursue an active school culture, therefore, each tool or resource that has been suggested is available at no-cost.

Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Opportunities for Physical Activity

Rationale: Physical activity is a right, not a privilege. Circumstances beyond the control of many families can influence access to physical activity opportunities and negatively impact the behaviors of children and adolescents. Disparities exist in health and physical activity behavior by gender, race-ethnicity, household income, and ability status. Schools can and should be a venue where ALL children have access to diverse, equitable, and inclusive opportunities to engage in health-enhancing amounts of daily physical activity.

Evidence-Based Practice #1

Offer a variety of physical activity opportunities before, during, and after the school day that will allow students to accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day

- ▷ Use subsequent sections of this School Implementation Guide and Menus of Evidence-Based Practices to identify and implement research-based physical activity programs and practices
- ▷ Make sure the school is offering more than 60 minutes of physical activity opportunities each day, knowing that not all time allocated for physical activity is spent being active at a moderate to vigorous level
- ▷ Ensure that physical activities are age appropriate, safe, and contribute to a child's lifelong enjoyment of physical activity



Use the Youth Activity Profile (YAP) to estimate the number of minutes students are participating in physical activity during school, at home, and overall

When reviewing data related to physical activity opportunities and participation rates, pay close attention to potential disparities between segments of the population

Evidence-Based Practice #2

Use inclusive strategies to ensure all students, regardless of ability status, have the opportunity to participate in physical activity and experience success

- ▷ Consider the principles of universal design when planning physical activity opportunities (i.e., be open to modifying instructions, equipment, and rules so that students have multiple means of understanding, engaging in activities, and expressing themselves)
- ▷ Use strategies such as differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, and trained para-professionals to support students with diverse abilities and needs

Evidence-Based Practice #3

Take a humanizing and culturally responsive approach to school physical activity promotion

- ▷ View diversity as an asset, seek to overcome stereotypes, and empower students through voice and autonomy
- ▷ When facilitating physical activity opportunities, ensure adults take time to get to know students, encourage student ownership, and hold space for student input/feedback

Evidence-Based Practice #4

Regularly evaluate physical activity offerings before, during, and after the school day

- ▷ Use a tool like the Physical Activity Program Opportunity Index to determine how many minutes of physical activity are being offered and who is participating
- ▷ Critically review physical activity opportunities for disparities in access or participation rates that may exist by age, gender, race/ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, ability/disability status, sexual orientation, and other personal or demographic characteristics
- ▷ Take steps to address any disparities that are identified to ensure equitable access to physical activity

Tools and Resources

- US Department of Health and Human Services: [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#)
- Institute of Medicine: [Educating the Student Body: Taking Physical Activity and Physical Education to School](#)
- Iowa State University: [Youth Activity Profile \(YAP\)](#)
- McKenzie & Lounsberry (2014): [Physical Activity Program Opportunity Index](#)
- Lieberman et al. (2021) [Human Kinetics]: [Universal Design for Learning in Physical Education](#)
- Lynch et al. (2020) & Landi et al., (2020) [JOPERD]: [The A-Z of Social Justice Physical Education \(Part 1\) \(Part 2\)](#)



Physical Education

Rationale: Physical education is where school-aged children and adolescents develop the necessary knowledge, skills, confidence, and dispositions to be physically active for a lifetime. Therefore, quality physical education is and should be the foundation of an active school, and physical education teachers must ensure that students receive a quality physical education experience in school. According to guidance from SHAPE America, The Essential Components of Physical Education encompass four fundamental areas school physical education should include: (a) policy and environment, (b) curriculum, (c) appropriate instruction, and (d) student assessment.

Evidence-Based Practice #1

Advocate for robust physical education policies and practices that are aligned with SHAPE America's national recommendations

- ▷ Ensure physical education is a required subject area for all students and sufficient minutes of physical education are being offered on a weekly basis
- ▷ Include all students in physical education and do not allow waivers, exemptions, or substitutions
- ▷ Ensure class sizes are similar to other subject areas and that physical education is being taught by a licensed physical education teacher
- ▷ Do not assign or withhold physical activity as punishment

Employ highly qualified physical education teachers who can deliver quality physical education aligned with national recommendations

Use resources provided by SHAPE America and the CDC to regularly review the school's physical education program

Evidence-Based Practice #2

Develop curriculum based on national or state physical education standards

- ▷ Have a written physical education curriculum for all grade levels that is sequential and comprehensive
- ▷ Have a physical education curriculum that is consistent with the design of the curricula for other subject areas

Evidence-Based Practice #3

Deliver appropriate instruction

- ▷ Use deliberate practice tasks that support the goals and objectives defined in the physical education curriculum and keep students moving at a moderate to vigorous intensity for at least 50% of class time
- ▷ Provide a customized education experience that meets the needs of each student and addresses the psychomotor, cognitive, and affective learning domains

Evidence-Based Practice #4

Regularly assess students

- ▷ Ensure assessments are aligned with national or state standards
- ▷ Monitor and assess student performance to gather evidence about student achievement and make inferences about student progress
- ▷ Grade students on standards-based learning objectives and regularly communicate results to students and parents



Tools and Resources

- SHAPE America: Physical Education Program Checklist
- SHAPE America: The Essential Components of Physical Education
- SHAPE America: Guide for Physical Education Policy
- SHAPE America: Grade-Level Outcomes for K-12 Physical Education
- SHAPE America: 20 Indicators of Effective Physical Education Instruction
- SHAPE America: Guidelines for Facilities, Equipment, Instructional Materials & Technology in K-12 Physical Education
- SHAPE America: Position Statement: Physical Education Is an Academic Subject
- SHAPE America: Position Statement: Physical Education is Essential for All Students: No Substitutions, Waivers or Exemptions for Physical Education
- CDC: Physical Education Analysis Tool (PECAT)

Physical Activity During the School Day

Rationale: Students spend the majority of their waking hours in school settings, therefore, finding ways for students to be active throughout the school day is an important strategy within an active school. Physical activity during the school day includes recess (or active breaks for secondary school students), dedicated classroom physical activity time, and other opportunities across the school day. These physical activity opportunities can supplement time spent in other active pursuits such as physical education and physical activity before and after school.

Evidence-Based Practice #1

Provide regular opportunities for students to be active throughout the school day

- ▷ Plan opportunities for physical activity during recess, breaks, transition/passing times, and during classroom time
- ▷ Adjust the school schedule to make traditionally sedentary times more active

Any amount of physical activity is good for kids – find times/places throughout the day to get students up and moving.

Secondary school students need movement too – make sure to implement these practices across all grade levels.

Evidence-Based Practice #2

Ensure that students have access to physical activity equipment and facilities

- ▷ Provide equipment and access to facilities during recess and break times (i.e., ensure that fields, courts, playgrounds, and gyms are accessible, have supervision, and have equipment available)
- ▷ Plan structured physical activity opportunities (e.g., intramurals, pick-up games, etc.) that are supervised by a trained adult during breaks and recess

Evidence-Based Practice #3

Provide professional development for classroom teachers

- ▷ Invite the active schools champion or members of the active school committee to provide professional development at faculty meetings and/or in-service days to train classroom teachers how to implement movement in their classrooms
- ▷ Share activities with school staff that can easily be integrated into their academic content, require little equipment, and are about 10-minutes in duration

Evidence-Based Practice #4

Arrange classrooms in a way that facilitates movement

- ▷ Structure the classroom environment in a way that allows space free of furniture, bags, etc. for students to move in the classroom.
- ▷ Consider the following arrangements: flexible seating, group tables, and pods



Tools and Resources

- Active Schools: [Active Classroom Resources](#)
- Action for Healthy Kids: [Active Outdoor Recess](#)
- CDC: [Classroom Physical Activity](#)



Physical Activity Before and After School

Rationale: The time immediately before the school day starts (~7:00-8:30am) and after the school day ends (~3:00-5:30pm) can be an ideal time for physical activity because there are minimal perceived conflicts with academic instruction time. Physical activity before school can prime the brain for learning and help kids start the day focused and on-task. Physical activity after school can offer important socialization opportunities for students while participating in health-enhancing behaviors. Schools should expand physical activity opportunities before and after school, and extend or enhance existing opportunities to maximize the amount of physical activity they provide.

Evidence-Based Practice #1

Promote active transportation to/from school

- ▷ Use existing programs like Safe Routes to School and Walking School Bus to encourage students to walk or bike to school
- ▷ Focus on safety when educating students and parents about active transportation and prioritizing environmental improvements
- ▷ Engage the broader school community in planning for active transportation to/from school



Survey students to determine which sports and physical activities they are most interested in participating in before or after school

Advocate for ongoing professional development for before and after school program providers so they have the knowledge and skills to deliver high quality programs

Evidence-Based Practice #2

Ensure before and after school programs include opportunities for structured and unstructured play

- ▷ Ensure before- and after-school program providers are aware of healthy eating and physical activity (HEPA) guidelines and are offering a minimum of 10 minutes of physical activity opportunities per hour of program time with limits on sedentary screen time
- ▷ Train staff to use physical activity promoting strategies like removing lines, avoiding elimination games, reducing team sizes, involving adults in games, and being creative with space
- ▷ Offer a variety of fun and non-competitive physical activity opportunities that align with the interests and abilities of diverse groups of students

Evidence-Based Practice #3

Offer intramural sports in addition to interscholastic sports

- ▷ Coordinate the use of facilities between school sponsored competitive sports, recreational intramural sports, and community sport organizations
- ▷ Offer a variety of traditional (e.g., basketball) and non-traditional (e.g., ultimate frisbee) sporting options
- ▷ Consider barriers like transportation when planning sporting opportunities before or after the school day

Tools and Resources

- Safe Routes to School: [Safe Routes to School Guide](#)
- Safe Routes to School: [Walking School Bus Guide](#)
- National Afterschool Association: [Healthy Eating and Physical Activity \(HEPA\) Guidelines for After School Programs](#)
- Aspen Institute Project Play: [School Sports Playbook](#)
- SHAPE America: [Position Statement on Before and After School Physical Activity and Intramural Programs](#)



School and Staff Leadership

Rationale: School staff are an integral part of an active school culture. Creating a high-functioning active school committee is important because schools need leadership from a variety of adults, as opposed to just one passionate individual. Additionally, school staff play an important role in modeling and promoting physical activity for students throughout the school day, and particularly through the implementation of physical activity in the classroom. In order to be fully equipped for their roles, staff should be provided with professional development and appropriate resources for success.

Evidence-Based Practice #1

Create a high-functioning active school committee

- ▷ Form a triad consisting of an active school champion, supportive school administrator, and an active school committee
- ▷ Identify an active school champion (oftentimes a physical education teacher) who can coordinate the active school committee, facilitate meetings, manage funds, and work closely with district and school administrators to manage policies, programs, events, and resources
- ▷ Seek out an administrator who is supportive, values and prioritizes physical activity, serves as a role model, supports physical activity programming, and builds community
- ▷ Include diverse education/health professionals and champions (e.g., physical education teachers, other teachers, staff, parents, students, health department representatives, health care providers, and administrators) on the active school committee



Establish roles within the active school committee so that everyone knows how to contribute to the team and its activities

Hold regularly scheduled active school committee meetings

Partner with local universities and other organizations who can help lead and support staff wellness programming

Evidence-Based Practice #2

Empower staff to incorporate physical activity into their classrooms

- ▷ Provide staff with on-going professional development and equipment/resources to facilitate the implementation of physical activity in the classroom

Evidence-Based Practice #3

Consider staff wellness within organizational goals and policies

- ▷ Align staff wellness programming with the school's annual and overall goals, creating a culture of wellness and physical activity

Evidence-Based Practice #4

Focus on multiple aspects of wellness, including physical activity, when developing staff wellness initiatives

- ▷ Provide staff with diverse opportunities to participate in staff wellness programming
- ▷ Offer self-care and self-management support such as personalized goal setting, wellness screening with follow up support, and counseling
- ▷ Offer incentives, make the program accessible, and offer a variety of engagement opportunities

Celebrate successes to motivate continued good work

Tools and Resources

- UNC Active Schools Institute: [Active School Committee Planning Tool](#)
- CDC: CSPAP: [A Guide for Schools - Step 1: Establish a Team](#)
- SHAPE America: CSPAP: [Step 1 - Establish a Team/Committee](#)
- National Association of Chronic Disease Directors: [Healthy School, Healthy Staff, Healthy Students: A Guide for Improving School Employee Wellness](#)
- CDC: [Workplace Health Promotion](#)





Planning, Implementation, & Evaluation

Rationale: Effectively developing and maintaining an active school culture requires systematic planning, implementation, and evaluation. Adding individual elements of an active school as opportunities arise can be a step in the right direction, but research shows that a more strategic approach will maximize the chances of realizing the benefits of physical activity for the school community.

Evidence-Based Practice #1

Conduct a needs assessment and determine goals and objectives

- ▷ Use a tool like the Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program Questionnaire to identify areas of strength and weakness in your school's current physical activity programming
- ▷ Focus on assets and build on your school's strengths and interests; don't feel like every gap has to be addressed right away
- ▷ In collaboration with an active school committee, write a goal statement that articulates the big-picture vision for physical activity in your school
- ▷ Write Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART) objectives for physical activity in your school

Once a physical activity plan for your school has been created, post it publicly on the school website or bulletin boards to enhance community awareness and buy-in

Evidence-Based Practice #2

Identify evidence-based practices for school-based physical activity and adapt them to fit your school community

- ▷ Use this School Implementation Guide and the Menus of Evidence-Based Practices to identify programs and strategies that have research to support that they work
- ▷ Consider the characteristics, needs, values, and preferences of your school community when selecting programs and strategies
- ▷ Consider what resources are available within your school community that can be capitalized upon
- ▷ Modify and adapt research-based programs and strategies to fit your school community while maintaining as much fidelity as possible with the features that have been shown to work

Evidence-Based Practice #3

Assess your school's current capacity and develop an implementation plan

- ▷ Consider your school's financial (e.g., budgets, grants), environmental (e.g., facilities, equipment), and human (e.g., school staff, partnerships) capacity for change
- ▷ Share the need for, and benefits of, any proposed interventions with the school community to gain buy-in before trying to implement them
- ▷ Use the three E's to think about how to Expand, Extend, and Enhance existing physical activity opportunities before, during, and after the school day
- ▷ Make a detailed list of tasks, assign specific people to be in charge of those tasks, and determine a timeline for implementation

Evidence-Based Practice #4

Conduct process and outcome evaluation

- ▷ Use the Active Schools Evaluation Handbook to conduct process and outcome evaluation of your physical activity programs
- ▷ Keep track of things like participation, frequency and duration of opportunities, costs, and participant satisfaction
- ▷ Measure outcomes associated with the goals and objectives your active school committee determined
- ▷ Be sure to use at least one measure of actual physical activity behavior like the Youth Active Profile

Evidence-Based Practice #5

Engage in data-driven continuous improvement efforts and build toward sustainability

- ▷ Spend time organizing, analyzing, and critically reflecting on the data you collect
- ▷ Identify areas of strength and weakness along with facilitators and barriers to implementation
- ▷ Approach data with a growth mindset and intentions toward continuous improvement
- ▷ To facilitate sustainability, carefully document implementation procedures
- ▷ Try to integrate new programs and practices with existing programs and practices so they are not perceived as separate or extra
- ▷ Provide ongoing training for facilitators and consider writing grants or connecting with parent organizations for future funding needs



Planning, Implementation, & Evaluation

1

Conduct a Needs Assessment and Determine Goals & Objectives

2

Identify Evidence-Based Practices and Adapt them to Fit your School Community

3

Assess your School's Current Capacity and Develop an Implementation Plan

4

Conduct a Process and Outcome Evaluation

5

Engage in Data-Driven Continuous Improvement Efforts and Build Toward Sustainability

Review process and outcome evaluation data on a consistent basis with members of the active school committee and use the data to drive future planning

Tools and Resources

- Stoepker et al. (2020): Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program Questionnaire (CSPAP-Q)
- Active Schools: Menus of Evidence-Based Practices (in development)
- Lee et al. (2020): School Wellness Readiness Assessment (SWRA)
- Active Schools: Evaluation Handbook
- Welk et al., (2021): Youth Activity Profile

Family & Community Engagement

Rationale: Families and members of the school community play a key role in influencing children's behavior. We know that children will most likely grow to be physically active adults when their families and larger community support engagement in regular physical activity. Family and community engagement in an active school not only influences children's physical activity engagement beyond school hours, but reinforces children's learning, health, and development across settings (i.e., in school, at home, in the community, and out-of-school programs). It is important to provide numerous and diverse physical activity engagement opportunities for families and community members throughout the school year to accommodate differences in schedules, skills, interests, etc. Moreover, frequent communication using multiple platforms allows for families and community members to stay engaged and informed.

Evidence-Based Practice #1

Include family and community members on active school committees

- ▷ Invite a diverse group of family and community members (e.g., physical education teachers, other teachers, staff, parents, students, health department representatives, health care providers, administrators) to serve on the active school committee

Evidence-Based Practice #2

Hold events for families and the community that promote and reinforce the goals of an active school

- ▷ Plan consistent and frequent events to accommodate families' diverse schedules
- ▷ Provide a combination of goal-setting and reinforcement strategies such as phone calls, texts, and emails to encourage reflection and further physical activity engagement

Evidence-Based Practice #3

Partner with community organizations and universities that share your school's vision for physical activity

- ▷ Develop shared-use agreements that allow community members to use school facilities and vice versa
- ▷ Invite community organizations to active school events and develop mutually-beneficial partnerships
- ▷ Partner with local universities to offer service learning experiences, professional development for teachers, and evaluation support



Use a range of strategies such as newsletters, emails, parent evenings, and movement homework to engage parents and families

Tools and Resources

- CDC: [Parents for Healthy Schools Resources](#)
- Alliance for a Healthier Generation: [Simple Ways to be an Active Role Model](#)
- Alliance for a Healthier Generation: [Resources and Ideas for Schools](#)
- PTA: [Encourage Physical Activity at Home](#)
- PTA: [Leading the Way in Transformative Family Engagement](#)

Invite local sporting organizations or businesses (e.g. YMCA, parks and recreation center, dance studios) to assist with your school's physical activity programs/initiatives



Policy and Advocacy

Rationale: In order to support the goals of an active school, physical activity and physical education should be considered in all school-level policy decisions. The good news is that there are several existing national-level policies that schools and districts can consider in their decision-making process. Additionally, to be most effective, schools should approach advocacy in a collaborative manner and work with like-minded organizations and groups when advocating for a more active school culture.

Evidence-Based Practice #1

Develop school-wide policies and practices that support the goals of an active school and establish mechanisms to ensure that policies are being implemented as intended

- ▷ Consider physical activity and physical education in all school-level policy decisions
- ▷ Consult state and national-level policy when developing school-based policies
- ▷ Develop ways to measure policy implementation and ensure that policies are being implemented with fidelity

Evidence-Based Practice #2

Provide professional development so that policies can be effectively implemented across the school

- ▷ Do not assume that all school personnel know about each relevant policy and/or how to implement it effectively
- ▷ Provide education in a variety of formats for the school community about existing policies related to physical activity

Evidence-Based Practice #3

Involve like-minded organizations in the development and support of school-wide policies

- ▷ Involve others who share your vision for an active school in your policy and advocacy efforts
- ▷ Develop coalitions that can support your ability to be a successful advocate

Evidence-Based Practice #4

When advocating, educate decision-makers about the benefits of physical education and physical activity

- ▷ Use ready-made advocacy resources developed by reputable organizations
- ▷ Ensure that decision-makers have all the facts when it comes to creating policy around physical activity and physical education
- ▷ Tailor your advocacy efforts so that you are providing meaningful and relevant information to each individual stakeholder group



Tools and Resources

- [SHAPE America: Advocacy Resources](#)
- [World Health Organization: A Practical Guide to Developing and Implementing School Policy on Diet and Physical Activity](#)

Find your people!
Policy and advocacy
work is more
effective when done
as part of a team

Prior to any policy
decision being made,
ensure that its effect on
school physical activity
is considered

Professional Development & Training

Rationale: Effective physical activity promotion begins with the members of a school community having the knowledge and skills to not only implement evidence-based practices, but to remain current and work toward sustainability. In order to be fully equipped for their roles, teachers and school staff should be provided with ongoing professional development and appropriate resources for success. Professional development must be made meaningful and should be facilitated with intentions to move the efforts of the collective forward.

Evidence-Based Practice #1

Deliver quality professional development for school teachers and staff

- ▷ Provide opportunities for active engagement during professional development sessions that include interactive learning strategies and authentic inquiry
- ▷ Ensure professional development sessions are based on participants needs and interests and are facilitated with care
- ▷ Provide ongoing support and strengthen professional networks to foster communities of continued learning
- ▷ Focus on student outcomes by addressing content knowledge, pedagogy, and assessment

Evidence-Based Practice #2

Offer physical activity-specific training to effectively integrate physical activity into programs and classrooms

- ▷ Ensure professional development offerings include physical activity promotional strategies for before, during, and after the school day and focus on systems level change within the broader school community
- ▷ Offer free registration/participation and continuing education credits for teachers
- ▷ Establish meaningful networking opportunities among physical activity professionals
- ▷ Train staff to implement one or two areas of CSPAP at a time, in support of a quality physical education program

Evidence-Based Practice #3

Identify a knowledgeable active school champion for your school campus

- ▷ The champion may be a physical education teacher, classroom teacher, administrator, school staff, or volunteer with physical activity-specific expertise
- ▷ Allow and encourage the champion to advocate for physical education and physical activity, coordinate trainings for, and be one of the organizers of schoolwide physical activity and health events
- ▷ Compensate the active school champion for their time

Evidence-Based Practice #4

Seek to hire new teachers of all subjects with strong physical activity-related skill sets and encourage staff to pursue ongoing professional development to maximize the number of trained educators on school campuses

- ▷ Identify pre-service teacher education programs in which elements of active school strategies are integrated into their undergraduate curricula
- ▷ Identify graduate programs that offer ongoing training for in-service teachers interested in promoting physical activity in schools
- ▷ Ask about physical activity-specific training and expertise in job interviews

Develop a professional learning community or community of practice for physical education and physical activity professionals in your school or district

Partner with a local university that can supply graduates with school-wide physical activity expertise and offer ongoing professional development for in-service teachers

Tools and Resources

- UNC Active Schools Institute: [Quality PD Checklist](#)
- CDC: [CSPAP Guide for Schools E-Learning Module](#)
- SHAPE America: [CSPAP Professional Development](#)
- [Springboard to Active Schools](#)
- [Online Physical Education Network](#)

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