

# At school



Outside of the home environment, children spend the bulk of their time at school, so this presents one of the best places for encouraging activity.

There are many specific challenges to increasing levels of physical activity in the school environment.

Victorian government schools must meet mandated time requirements for physical and sport education for students in Prep to Year 10 (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2013).

However, educators within schools are expected to focus strongly on students' academic performance which has seen physical education become less of a priority. There is also the perception that time spent on physical education and recess will undermine learning (ACHPER Victorian Branch 2013).

Some schools are no longer employing trained physical education teachers to deliver programs and may not be meeting national curriculum guidelines in relation to physical education and sport (Hajkowicz et al 2013, Independent Sport Panel 2009).

As a result, children are less likely to be taught fundamental movement skills, such as throwing, catching or kicking a ball – the foundation stones for a range of sports, games and activities (Hardy et al 2013).

The traditional school structure, where most learning occurs in a classroom setting, also leaves children with limited opportunities to be active during school hours.

Outside of class times, if children don't have access to the right facilities, such as sports ovals and play areas, and the right equipment, such as bats and balls, their opportunities to be active are further reduced (Ridgers 2013).

Early childhood settings provide an important place to introduce and encourage good habits through active play, which contributes to a child's development, including their social and language skills (Department of Health and Ageing 2009).

## Benefits to schools of having active students

The integration of physical activity in the school environment has the potential to enhance student engagement and academic performance, develop students as leaders and create a more positive learning environment.

A focus on quality physical education and sport within schools can enhance students' knowledge of the importance of physical activity and promote positive behaviour change.

Consequently, a quality physical education and sport program has potential to raise a school's profile within the community.

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**'A comprehensive, well-resourced health and physical education program teaches students necessary fundamental movement skills, game and recreational capabilities, and develops knowledge and behaviours that can lead to a healthy and active life'**

HILARY SHELTON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR HEALTH, PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND RECREATION (ACHPER) VICTORIAN BRANCH

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**'Recent Australian work shows that schools with well-conducted physical education and where children are fitter have higher than average National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) scores. Time away from the classroom for physical education and sport should not be seen as time away from learning but an integral part of learning'**

PROFESSOR RICHARD TELFORD, UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA



# Practical actions for building physical activity into the school environment

Shifting the concepts of *design* and *time* within a school environment can create more opportunities for children to be active in a school day.



## ACTION

Introduce variety into play spaces, temporary play equipment or structures to stimulate children's imagination and interest and encourage play-based activity.



Consider:

- Introducing pop-up play spaces to provide new play experiences.
- Using a variety of equipment or objects, such as car tyres, to stimulate creative play.
- Encouraging multi-use of spaces for a variety of sports, games and activities, such as putting temporary tennis nets on a basketball court.

Having access to sports equipment, such as bats and balls, play equipment and playground markings during lunch and recess times has been linked to increases in physical activity, through play and games (Ridgers 2013, Ridgers et al 2013).



What spaces and places within your school grounds can be better used or modified to create a variety of opportunities and experiences for play?



## ACTION

Explore alternative options for delivering sport and physical education, to enhance students' fundamental movement skills, enjoyment and participation.



Consider:

- Student-led classes, to improve students' experiences, skills and ability, develop student leaders and enhance social connections across the school (see Leadership development through school sports case study p 24).
- Sharing trained teachers, sports equipment and temporary play facilities with nearby schools to reduce costs and enhance physical activity opportunities for students.

Having adequately trained teachers to deliver sport programs and physical education (PE) classes has been linked to increases in children's physical activity (Ridgers et al 2013).



**What existing resources, partnerships or programs can be leveraged to support and enhance the delivery of sport and physical education in your school?**



## ACTION

Consider a whole-school approach to physical activity involving students, staff, families and community organisations to encourage positive attitudes towards physical activity in children and more active lifestyles for families (see the Phoenix P-12 Community College case study p 25).



Consider:

- Using existing initiatives to establish partnerships with sport and recreation clubs, local councils or to create new non-traditional community partnerships, for example, with local workplaces.
- Creating greater awareness among parents and children of the opportunities to be active outside of the school.
- Strengthening relevant school policies to support physical activity.

Programs that encourage engagement between a school, parents and the community, such as active travel initiatives like VicHealth's Walk to School campaign ([walktoschool.vic.gov.au](http://walktoschool.vic.gov.au)) are longer term and have been shown to have positive outcomes on children's physical activity levels (Ridgers et al 2013).

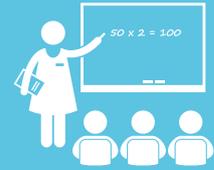


**How can schools use physical activity as a focus to strengthen existing and build new community partnerships?**



## ACTION

Change teaching and learning methods across subject areas and modify the learning environment to integrate elements of physical activity within the existing school curriculum.



Consider:

- Holding outdoor or walking classes.
- Incorporating outdoor activities and projects in subjects such as maths, science and geography.
- Using sport, dance, active play or walking in delivering the school curriculum.
- Using standing lessons to break up extended sitting time.

Reducing the time children spend sitting in classrooms and encouraging learning through activities is an important opportunity to build in more movement during the school day.



**How can physical activity be integrated into teaching methods and learning environments at your school, to the same level that technology has been integrated?**



## ACTION

Engage students to lead the solutions to encourage walking and riding to school, such as through a school project or student committee. This will help to raise students' awareness of active travel options, engage parents in the discussion and strengthen links between the school and local stakeholders, such as councils and public transport operators.



Consider:

- Engaging students in the design and provision of safe and secure bike parking.
- Undertaking school projects focused on active travel, such as walkability audits.

Supporting children to walk, ride, scooter or skate to and from school can increase their level of daily activity and reduce traffic congestion around schools during drop-off and pick-up times.



**How can active travel be integrated into the school curriculum or school policy, to increase the number of students taking active travel options?**



## ACTION

Create schools as hubs for sport and dance programs. This can make these activities more accessible to more children by reducing travel times, particularly if they're scheduled to complement school hours.



Consider:

- Shared facility use arrangements with sporting clubs or community groups.
- Using school facilities for community-based activities.

Where programs are delivered has a big impact on whether children can participate, particularly if they're reliant on parents' time and availability to provide transport (Ridgers 2013, Ridgers et al 2013) or access to alternative transport options is limited.



### What opportunities are there to make school facilities available for other activities?

Further information and resources to support these actions are available on VicHealth's website ([www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/activeforlife](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/activeforlife))

## CASE STUDY

# Leadership development through school sports

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Primary school students in some Victorian schools are being offered a fun, exciting alternative to traditional teacher-led sport programs through the Sport Ambassador Program.

An initiative of School Sport Victoria, the program sees older students undergo leadership training and coaching accreditation so they can lead and deliver physical activity and sports programs to primary school students.

Younger students get to interact with and learn from the student leaders, enhancing their enjoyment of participating in sports and physical activity programs and helping to develop strong connections across students of different ages.

For the older students, the program uses sport as a foundation to build their leadership potential, instilling them with confidence, providing them with important life skills and opening up a possible career path in sport.

Participants move along a clear leadership pathway starting in Year 5 and going through to Year 12, with strong support, mentoring and coaching throughout.

The first stage of the program sees Year 5 and 6 students undergo leadership training and deliver activities and games to Prep to Year 3 students to improve their fundamental movement skills.



## CASE STUDY

# Phoenix P-12 Community College gets active

Ballarat's Phoenix P-12 Community College is taking a whole-school approach to improving students health and wellbeing outcomes, as well as forging strong links with community services.

In November 2012, the school joined the Achievement Program, a Healthy Together Victoria initiative, supporting the development of healthy schools, early childhood services, workplaces and workforces.

The Achievement Program provides a quality framework for creating healthy learning environments and engaging students, staff and families through a whole-school approach.

As part of their whole-school approach, Phoenix Community College has established a Health and Wellbeing team involving senior management, teaching staff, students and parents, while connections have been made with Ballarat Community Health Services and the City of Ballarat.

A survey of students and families identified physical activity as a key health priority.

On the back of the survey results and a health needs analysis, the school prepared an action plan for making physical activity part of everyday school life by integrating it into policy, plans and classroom lessons, developing a healthy culture and environment and forming partnerships in the community. Strategies include:

- involving students in decision-making around building physical activity into the curriculum
- informing families about local activity-based events and encouraging their involvement
- promoting active transport to and from school
- investigating safe pathways to school in conjunction with the City of Ballarat and communicating the findings to families.

Teaching staff are being supported with professional development to build their knowledge and capacity around physical activity. They are also being supplied with sports equipment in their classrooms to encourage active learning.

As well as running after-school activities and events, the school has partnered with The University of Ballarat to run physical activities in the school as part of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Program.

