

# The Importance of Physical Activity across the School Day

Over the pandemic, [CanadaGo4Sport](#), [CIRA-Ontario](#), [Ophea](#), [Ontario Association for the Support of Physical and Health Educators \(OASPHE\)](#), [Playocracy](#), [Raise the Bar](#) (an Intramural Program school-wide initiative managed by Ophea), and [Recess Guardians](#) have been engaged in discussions around the importance of quality, safe, and inclusive physical activity opportunities for all students. This is a collective goal of all of our organizations as we aim to positively contribute to student well-being.

## **Sustainable action requires a collective dialogue.**

It's our belief that sustainable action focused on increasing opportunities for students to be physically active requires a collective dialogue involving many key partners, including students, educators, and experts in physical activity. We believe that action is required to:

- increase the number of students that are participating in physical activity opportunities, both face to face and as part of remote learning;
- establish a collaborative process to ensure all schools, communities and families have access to resources, supports and expertise needed to support quality, safe and inclusive opportunities for students; and
- increase the capacity and reduce the barriers in schools and communities to offer a wider variety of physical activity opportunities for students.

COVID-19 continues to present many challenges to Ontario students and families. Providing quality, safe, and inclusive physical activity opportunities supports student learning including critical thinking and collaboration, better physical and mental health outcomes, and is positively correlated to academic achievement.

Data from the [2020 ParticipACTION Report Card](#), showed that only 39% of 5 to 17 year-olds are meeting recommended physical activity guidelines. Recent research has demonstrated that COVID-19 has negatively affected child and youth physical activity levels even further and we are at crisis levels. <sup>i</sup>

The school community setting is an ideal environment to take a holistic approach to providing all students with physical activity opportunities each day. Schools are uniquely positioned to positively influence levels of physical activity as they reach the vast majority of children and youth, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity or family circumstances. Families connected to the school community can encourage and support increased physical activity and reduce sedentary time for their children by prioritizing physical activity and incorporating it into daily routines, creating a mindset where being active won't have to be a choice for Canadian children and youth, it will become second nature.

Currently, COVID-19 has made implementation of physical activity at the school level challenging. Additionally, student participation is taking place remotely, adding increased complexity to ensuring all students have access to physical activity.

### **Identification of meaningful opportunities for all students.**

When executed purposefully, quality, safe and inclusive physical activity opportunities allow all students to participate. They can also foster student leadership and create a strong sense of belonging. Participation in physical activity opportunities connected to the school day can further support and enhance each student's physical literacy journey.

We believe that daily physical education and access to physical activity is a fundamental right for all students in Ontario. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child substantiates the foundation of our collective goal:

- to support student voice;
- to enhance and develop the four domains of well-being (physical, social, emotional, and cognitive);
- to engage in educational opportunities;
- to develop self-identity, and
- the right to play.<sup>ii</sup>

These rights directly link to quality delivery of physical education, play, recess, and intramurals and to successful development of the whole student.

### **Imagining new opportunities requires expertise, creative thinking, and innovative solutions.**

When it comes to getting students active, physical education, play, recess and intramurals are key opportunities the school setting can offer. Exploring new ways to increase physical activity opportunities for students requires expertise, creative thinking and innovative solutions. These solutions also require a change in thinking and professional practice and might include consideration of the following questions:

- Are strategies designed to enhance and improve physical activity across the school day having the desired impact to get more students active?
- Is there the ability to evaluate outcomes, identifying what works and what doesn't, and update plans with ongoing modification to ensure quality engagement?
- What strategies are in place to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of the school community in supporting parents/caregivers, teachers and students?

We encourage an approach that utilizes the expertise from across the province with a mindset that identifies safe opportunities for students to be active and focuses on finding solutions to barriers that inhibit this from occurring within the school setting.

**Student voice, choice, and leadership encourage active engagement and a strong sense of belonging.**

When students are involved in decisions regarding the types of physical activity opportunities offered, the activities are more likely to meet the broader interests of all students. Providing opportunities for student voice, choice, and leadership will also help to encourage active engagement of more students and create a strong sense of belonging. Offering a wide variety of opportunities can attract and engage new participants creating a more inclusive environment. Depending on student interests, staff and students might choose to run fitness-based activities or variations on traditional games that introduce rules or equipment that level the playing field. These opportunities ensure the development of a wide variety of life skills that will contribute to the overall development and well-being of the student both immediately and throughout their lives.

We encourage the province (governments, school boards, schools, communities, families) to prioritize and ensure adequate supports so that schools have the capacity, resources and infrastructure to provide quality, safe and inclusive opportunities for all students to realize the benefits of being physically active.

In the spirit of collaboration we both invite you to add your voice to this important advocacy.

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<sup>i</sup> ParticipACTION. The Role of the Family in the Physical Activity, Sedentary and Sleep Behaviours of Children and Youth. The 2020 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. Toronto: ParticipACTION; 2020. Retrieved from [https://participaction.cdn.prismic.io/participaction/f6854240-ef7c-448c-ae5c-5634c41a0170\\_2020\\_Report\\_Card\\_Children\\_and\\_Youth\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](https://participaction.cdn.prismic.io/participaction/f6854240-ef7c-448c-ae5c-5634c41a0170_2020_Report_Card_Children_and_Youth_Full_Report.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> United Nations. Convention on the Rights of a Child. Toronto: United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner; 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>