

Rockland County's Steps Program

Improving students' health and academics



What is the public health problem?

Inactivity and unhealthy eating habits among the county's young people increase their risks for overweight and obesity. According to data from the 2005* Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System,

- 54% of Rockland County students did not meet currently recommended physical activity levels (includes both school and leisure-time activity).
- Only about 4% of Rockland County high school students attended physical education classes daily.

How Steps is responding

The Steps Program launched the Learning in Motion: Physical Activity, the Brain, and Achievement curriculum, which promotes physical activity as a way to encourage academic achievement.

- This innovative curriculum trains K–12 teachers on the importance of proper nutrition for optimal brain function and how to integrate physical activity with language arts, math, social studies, science, and health lessons. Teachers use fun, interactive assignments that encourage movement to improve students' memory and address their different learning styles.
- Goals of the program are to reduce sedentary behavior during the school day, to enhance students' overall understanding of subject matter content, and to help students develop lifelong healthy behaviors such as being physically active.

What is the impact?

- Learning in Motion enhances academic performance and promotes healthy behaviors that can help prevent childhood overweight. Since 2004, more than 150 teachers in Rockland County's nine school districts have been trained to incorporate physical activity into their lesson plans. The program is used at 47 schools, reaching more than 14,200 students.
- In a follow-up survey at the end of the school year, 95% of teachers said they used physical activity in their classrooms at least several times a week; 85% said they used it daily or several times per day.
- According to teacher surveys, students reported feeling more energized, having better self-esteem, and being more alert during classes.

Why this program is working

Training recommended in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Guidelines for School and Community Programs to Promote Lifelong Physical Activity Among Young People*[†] results in active involvement by the entire school staff in helping sustain a healthy environment that promotes physical activity.

* Most recent data available

[†] <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00046823.htm>