

Extracurricular Physical Activity Programs

Extracurricular physical activity programs provide students with additional opportunities to be active and to use the skills taught in physical education class. They also offer important social and psychological benefits: Studies have found that participation in extracurricular activities is negatively associated with tobacco and other drug use and positively associated with good conduct, academic achievement, and staying in school.

Extracurricular opportunities to engage in physical activity may be interscholastic or intramural. Interscholastic sports programs consist of team or individual competition between schools, and intramural programs consist of sports and recreational activities, both competitive and non-competitive, among students within one school. At present, interscholastic sports programs, which serve only a small portion of the student body, are more commonly available than intramural programs.

In keeping with a more inclusive approach to promoting physical activity, all schools should offer quality intramural programs that feature a diverse selection of competitive and non-competitive, structured and unstructured activities that meet the needs, interests, and abilities of all students. In addition to team sports, intramural programs could include physical activity clubs (e.g., dance, hiking, yoga). Because they can be designed for students with a wide range of abilities, intramural programs may be beneficial for the large group of students who have not participated much in physical activity: boys and girls who lack the skills or confidence to play interscholastic sports or who dislike competitive sports altogether. Whereas interscholastic sports emphasize competition and winning, intramurals emphasize participation and enjoyment without pressure. However, to promote physical activity among young people, high schools should continue to offer interscholastic sports programs.

Source: Wechsler H, Devereaux AB, Davis M, Collins J. Using the school environment to promote physical activity and healthy eating. *Preventive Medicine* 2000;31:S121-S137.