

Get Moving: Promoting Safe Routes to School for Student Health

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RunningBrooke offers 5 Best Practices for how to implement effective physical activity into the school day and week. This is the final in a five-part series to explain these practices and show how to find small pockets of time to get Alexandria's youth moving to meet the CDC-recommended 60 minutes of daily activity.

Best Practice #5: City-wide Promotion of Safe Routes to School

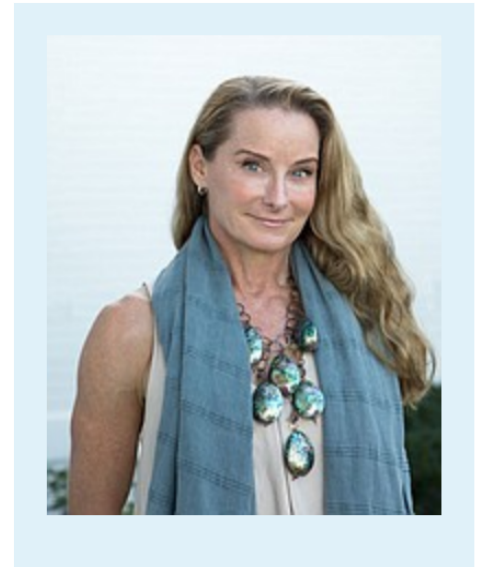
As we strive to help students find pockets of time to squeeze in the CDC-recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day, considering how they get to and from school is a natural place to look. Previous generations walked and biked to and from school a lot more than we do today. The Safe Routes to School National Partnership says: "As the stats bear out, kids today have become less active, less independent, and less healthy. In 1969, nearly 50 percent of all children in the United States (and nearly 90 percent of those within a mile of school) walked or bicycled to school. Today, that number has plummeted to fewer than 15 percent."

When students actively commute to and from school, not only are they getting more exercise, it increases their overall level of activity throughout the day, improves their overall fitness, and primes their brains to better absorb academic material. Studies demonstrate that active students outperform their less active peers academically. In addition, regular exercise has the benefits of helping students improve their memory and attention and stay on-task, reducing disruptive behavior in the classroom. In short, walking or biking to and from school can make our students happier, healthier, and smarter.

Because walking or biking to school happens out in the community rather than inside a more controlled environment of a school or playground, specific standards must be considered to keep students safe. According to the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, infrastructure improvements, student traffic education, and driver enforcement that improve safety for children are essential. In Alexandria, efforts are underway to get our students actively commuting to school and make our community more active-transportation-friendly.

Mike Humphreys, an NBCT instructional specialist for Health, Physical Education and Family Life Education in the ACPS Office of Curriculum Design and Instructional Services, says, "The division is committed to improving both the safety and walkability/bike-ability of its schools. Thanks to a recent grant award from the Virginia Department of Education, we now have a part-time Safe Routes to School Division Coordinator in addition to more resources with which to promote active commuting and other related initiatives. Walking or biking to and from school is a great way for students to get their 60 minutes of movement each day."

To learn more about safe routes to school in your neighborhood, contact Tracy Lupient, Safe Routes to



School Division Coordinator, at teresa.lupient@acps.k12.va.us.

Thank you for joining us for this 5-part series to discuss the best practices for getting our students moving more each day. To learn more and see past articles, please visit runningbrooke.org/move2learn.