Physically active students tend to have better grades, classroom behavior and school attendance than their sedentary classmates. But Wisconsin youth struggle to meet the 60 minutes of daily physical activity recommended by the American Heart Association. The American Heart Association is helping change that fact through its Accelerating National Community Health Outcomes through Reinforcing (ANCHOR) Partnerships Program. In collaboration with the Department of Public Instruction, the local ANCHOR program is building on state-wide momentum to provide focused training and technical assistance within schools in select Wisconsin school districts to implement strategies outlined by the Active Schools Core 4+ Program. Created by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Active Schools: Core 4+ is Wisconsin’s version of the Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program created by SHAPE America and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. ANCHOR program schools are providing students with new opportunities to be active during the day, and are able to take the lessons learned to help other interested schools in their district implement the Active Schools: Core 4+ Strategies. These efforts help incorporate more physical activity into the lives of students before, during, and after school. The schools all pursued increased activity differently, whether it be planning a community run at Prairie View Elementary in De Soto, or “Chasing the Rainbow Brain” at Johnson Elementary School in Appleton.

“...the students and I discussed the value of preparing our body before big academic tasks. They would say, ‘I just made a Rainbow Brain!’ That meant during physical education we were being physically active so we would learn more during classroom time.”

- Jennifer Buss: Physical Education Teacher at Johnston Elementary School

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The Challenge
The American Heart Association recommends that youth get 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity per day. Wisconsin youth are falling short of that recommendation. Elementary students spend approximately 1,000 hours of their year in school, with the majority of their time taken up by sedentary learning, often behind school desks. Research has found that physically active students have better focus, get higher grades and show improved behavior when compared to their inactive peers.

The Solution
The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction created Active Schools Core 4+, a set of “four-plus” strategies to increase physical activity throughout the day. Each of the schools participating in the ANCHOR Program took a different approach, uniquely implementing the strategies. Johnston Elementary School in Appleton uses the ASC4+ strategies to encourage students to achieve a “Rainbow Brain.” In 2013, the school’s students were shown images of brain scans taken before and after physical activity; when discussing which brain would perform better if given a test, the students agreed it would be the one they dubbed the “Rainbow Brain” – the brain post activity. While they are not chasing a “Rainbow Brain,” both Wauzeka and Prairie View Elementary Schools have successfully implemented ASC4+ strategies. Wauzeka has successfully implemented all five strategies, with four of the strategies being new this year. Prairie View Elementary pursued the Active Community/Active Family engagement strategy, and is hosting a “Color Run” type event at the end of April for parents and the community.

Sustaining Success
The American Heart Association’s ANCHOR program has partnered with these Wisconsin schools to increase activity for years to come. The ANCHOR Program provided the schools with training and technical assistance, utilizing Active Schools: Core 4+ strategies to increase physical activity opportunities throughout the day. Currently, the schools have successfully implemented their selected strategies and are taking these lessons to the district as a whole. Different opportunities, such as intramural yoga, action-heavy “brain breaks” during classroom time, and walking laps during recess time before free play have all been implemented to the benefit of the students.

Policy, System and Environmental Change
The six schools have utilized its Active Schools: Core 4+ training from ANCHOR to create systemic and environmental changes. The Core 4+ strategies have been adopted in the classroom, during recess breaks to make them more physically active, and outside of class hours through before- and after-school programs. Teachers and staff are working together to provide students with optimal opportunities for physical activity. They also are creating an environment where physical activity is a normal part of school culture.

Results
Nearly 29,000 students across the six districts currently benefit from ANCHOR’s support of Active Schools: Core 4+ strategies to increase physical activity throughout the school day. Students utilize these additional opportunities to be active in order to increase their academic performance and improve their health. The interest and excitement of the students for increased physical activity is noticeable to the schools, and a positive indicator of success.

Get Involved
Get involved with your local school district and talk about the benefits of kids being physically active throughout the school day to help them achieve their own rainbow brains!