Good nutrition is certainly important, but increasing physical activity minutes and ensuring quality physical education classes for all students are just as vital to improved student health and academic success.”

- Jennifer Quigley-Harris, Providence Public School District wellness coordinator and the mother of two
The Solution

The Providence Public School District strives to implement a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program (CSPAP) at each of its schools. Developed by SHAPE America and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CSPAP is a multi-component approach to incorporating physical activity into the lives of students throughout their day, including before and after school.

In January 2016, a workshop to help all district physical education teachers develop a CSPAP for their schools was coordinated by American Heart Association staff in Providence, along with the Rhode Island Department of Health; Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition; and the Rhode Island Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance.

Teachers learned how others successfully incorporated physical activity outside of physical education classes and into the overall school culture. They heard about schools hosting gym activities for students while their parents met teachers for conferences. They also learned about after-school yoga classes, and a program that encourages students who live within a mile from school to walk instead of taking the bus.

Sustaining Success

As the first important step toward building a successful CSPAP program, physical education teachers at each participating school are building teams of volunteers to help implement an action plan to engage their entire school staff in incorporating physical activity into lesson plans and school breaks outside of physical education classes. Jennifer Quigley-Harris, wellness director for the Providence Public School District, will make sure participating school teams are aware of each other’s efforts and activities and will continue to provide resource materials and ongoing training. The long-term plan is to extend CSPAP into all schools, starting first with the elementary schools.

Policy, System and Environmental Change

CSPAP training is a strong starting point to implement the Providence Public School District’s wellness policy, which states “schools should encourage physical activity beyond the Physical Education program, such as before and after school programs.” The policy also advises physical activity to be “incorporated into the daily school curriculum and prioritized as essential to student social and academic achievement.” As CSPAP-trained physical education teachers implement their programs, the school district’s wellness director will hold regular meetings for participants to help facilitate an exchange of ideas and best practices.

Results

Just from the 12 schools represented at the January training workshop, CSPAP has the potential to leave an impact on more than 10,000 students, their families and the staff who work with them in Providence schools. Some district teachers have already implemented CSPAP components, including a pair of physical education teachers at one elementary school that offer a morning fitness program before the day’s first bell. The program has proved popular, and the school has seen improved attendance, focus and classroom behavior among students.

Get Involved

Family engagement is an important component of CSPAP and Providence parents are urged to contact Jennifer Quigley-Harris (Jennifer.QuigleyHarris@ppsd.org) to join a CSPAP committee or to get involved with activities. Parents are also urged to contact their school principal if CSPAP is not available in their school.