

SPARK Alignment to the White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity Report to the President

A Summary of How Spark Supports the Goals and Recommendations of The White House Task Force On Childhood Obesity Report to the President: *Solving The Problem Of Childhood Obesity Within A Generation.*



SPARK: Countering Childhood Obesity Since 1989

SPARK is a research-based, public health organization of San Diego State University Research Foundation (disseminated by School Specialty, Inc.) dedicated to creating, implementing, and evaluating programs that promote lifelong wellness.

SPARK strives to improve the health of children, adolescents, and adults by disseminating evidence-based Physical Education, After School, Early Childhood, and Coordinated School Health programs to teachers and recreation leaders serving Pre-K through 12th grade students.

Each SPARK program fosters environmental and behavioral change by providing a coordinated package of highly active curriculum, on-site teacher training, extensive follow-up support, and content-matched equipment.

Since 1989, SPARK has provided curriculum, training, and consultation to over 100,000 teachers and youth leaders, representing many thousands of schools, organizations, and agencies worldwide.

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Background

Recently, First Lady Michelle Obama launched the Let's Move! campaign to solve the childhood obesity epidemic within one generation. In support of the Let's Move! effort, the Task Force on Childhood Obesity was established by President Barack Obama to develop and implement an inter agency plan that details a coordinated strategy, identifies key benchmarks, and outlines an action plan to end the problem of childhood obesity within a generation.

The report, titled *Solving the Problem of Childhood Obesity Within a Generation*, includes Early Childhood Education, Physical Education and Physical Activity recommendations. SPARK is already well aligned with the recommendations in this report:

Early Childhood Education

“Young children need opportunities to be physically active through play and other activities. Physical activity assists children in obtaining and improving fine and gross motor skill development, coordination, balance and control, hand-eye coordination, strength, dexterity, and flexibility—all of which are necessary for children to reach developmental milestones.

Preschool years, in particular, are crucial for obesity prevention due to the timing of the development of fat tissue, which typically occurs from ages 3-7.... Features of the child care center environment, including policies regarding activity and provider training, as well as the presence of portable and fixed play equipment, influence the amount of physical activity children engage in while at child care.”

- SPARK Early Childhood (EC) is designed to provide children ages 3-5 with high activity, academically integrated, enjoyable movement opportunities that foster social and motor development and enhance school readiness skills.
- SPARK EC was one of the first large-scale, urban efforts to evaluate a comprehensive physical activity program for the 3-5 age group. The project concluded in winter 2004, and showed the SPARK EC program was very well received by the Head Start teachers, increased students' moderate to vigorous activity levels to over 50% of class time, and improved the number of minutes children engaged in activity throughout the day.

School-Based Approaches to Increasing Physical Activity

“Schools are a key setting to focus on, given the significant portion of time children spend there. Schools can undertake a combination of strategies and approaches to help children be more active including:

- Creating infrastructure and policies that increase access to and encourage physical activity for all students;
- Collecting valid and reliable data and using analytical tools and systems to understand student needs and fitness levels, and promoting approaches that are effective in changing physical activity behaviors and, ultimately, health outcomes;
- Maintaining strong physical education (PE) programs that engage students in moderate to vigorous physical activity for at least 50% of PE class time;

- Providing a variety of activities and specific skills so that students can be physically active not just during class but throughout the day and year; and
- Providing qualified school professionals who are trained in teaching methods to engage students in PE, including for students who face greater barriers to activity.”
 - SPARK physical education and activity programs have been PROVEN to increase levels of MVPA to over 50% of class time.
 - SPARK was recently identified as a successful model for combating childhood obesity in the report, “Fighting Obesity: What Works, What’s Promising” by the HSC Foundation. The report speaks of SPARK’s history, practice, and methods. SPARK was the ONLY program recommended for physical education AND physical activity.
 - SPARK is the ONLY National Institute of Health (NIH) researched program available providing coordinated curriculum, training, follow up support, and equipment for Pre-K through 12th grade teachers.
 - A Child Trends report titled “What Works for the Prevention and Treatment of Obesity Among Children”, highlights SPARK as a program that has proven to increase physical activity among students.

Physical Education

“Physical Education (PE) is considered the cornerstone of a school-based comprehensive physical activity program. It provides the basis and opportunity for young people to gain the knowledge and skills needed to maintain physically active lifestyles throughout childhood and into adulthood. A quality PE program can increase student participation in physical activity, increase their physical fitness, and enhance their understanding about the purpose and methods of physical activity. Participation in daily PE is associated with an increased likelihood of participating regularly in moderate to vigorous physical activity.”

- SPARK Physical Education is an award-winning, research-based program that has been proven to increase activity levels, knowledge, skills, and fitness. SPARK elementary physical education is the ONLY nationally-disseminated program that positively affects ALL of these student outcomes:
 - Academic Achievement
 - Activity levels (moderate to vigorous surpasses 50% of class time)
 - Fitness achievement
 - Sport Skills development
 - Enjoyment of PE
- SPARK is the only PE program that has data to show students statistically significantly increase their Fitnessgram scores.
- SPARK activities can be integrated throughout the school day to help your school provide physical education daily

Nutrition Education

“More, and better, nutrition education is needed in many schools. While approximately 75% of schools require nutrition education as part of health curriculum requirements, the time spent on nutrition and dietary behavior has declined in recent years, and funding has been limited. Many teachers are not equipped with the skills and knowledge to integrate and promote nutrition education into their classroom curricula. Research has shown that nutrition education interventions, if well designed and effectively implemented can improve dietary behaviors.”

- SPARK has teamed up with Healthy Kids Challenge and Healthy Lifestyle Choices to provide nutrition and health education curriculum and training programs
- Healthy Kids Challenge is a nationally recognized non-profit led by an exemplary team of registered, licensed dietitians with many years of school, program, and community wellness experience
- Healthy Lifestyle Choices curriculum is flexible and provides a variety of scheduling and implementation options for busy elementary teachers

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Recommendation	Early Childhood	Physical Education	After School	Coordinated School Health
I. Early Childhood				
Recommendation 1.8: The AAP guidelines on screen time should be made more available to parents, and young children should be encouraged to spend less time using digital media and more time being physically active.	SPARK Early Childhood Program			
II. Empowering Parents and Caregivers				
Recommendation 2.13: Medical and other health professional schools, health professional associations, and health care systems should ensure that health care providers have the necessary training and education to effectively prevent, diagnose, and treat obese and overweight children		SPARK and MEND	SPARK and MEND	SPARK and MEND

Recommendation	Early Childhood	Physical Education	After School	Coordinated School Health
III. Healthy Food in Schools				
Recommendation 3.2: Increase resources for school meals.				SPARK IGNITING A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM
Recommendation 3.12: Technical assistance should be provided to schools about how to a cafeteria and lunch room environment can support and encourage a healthful meal.				SPARK IGNITING A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM
Recommendation 3.15: School districts should be encouraged to create, post, and implement a strong local school wellness policy.				SPARK IGNITING A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM
Recommendation 3.16: Promote good nutrition through after school programs.				SPARK NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAM
IV. Access to Healthy, Affordable Food				
Recommendation 4.6: Encourage publicly and privately-managed facilities that serve children, such as hospitals, after school programs, recreation centers, and parks (including national parks) to implement policies and practices, consistent with the Dietary Guidelines, to promote healthy foods and beverages and reduce or eliminate the availability of calorie-dense, nutrient-poor foods.			SPARK IGNITING A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM & SPARK NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAM	

Recommendation	Early Childhood	Physical Education	After School	Coordinated School Health
V. Increasing Physical Activity				
Recommendation 5.3: State and local educational agencies should be encouraged to increase the quality and frequency of sequential, age- and developmentally- appropriate physical education for all students, taught by certified PE teachers.		SPARK K-2, 3-6, MIDDLE SCHOOL, AND HIGH SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS		
Recommendation 5.4: State and local educational agencies should be encouraged to promote recess for elementary students and physical activity breaks for older students, and provide support to schools to implement recess in a healthy way that promotes physical activity and social skill development.		SPARK K-2, 3-6, MIDDLE SCHOOL, AND HIGH SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS		
Recommendation 5.5: State and local educational agencies should be encouraged to provide opportunities in and outside of school for students at increased risk for physical inactivity, including children with disabilities, children with asthma and other chronic diseases, and girls.		SPARK K-2, 3-6, MIDDLE SCHOOL, AND HIGH SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS	SPARK AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM	
Recommendation 5.6: Federal, state, and local educational agencies, in partnership with communities and businesses, should work to support programs to extend the school day, including after school programs, which offer and enhance physical activity opportunities in their programs.			SPARK AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM	