

# Making Physical Education a Curriculum and Health Enhancement in Fulton County

by: Sonja Steptoe

## SUMMARY

To meet its goal of reducing obesity among school-aged children, the Fulton County Partnerships to Improve Community Health (PICH) Program began by showing teachers how to add physical activities into the jam-packed school day creatively. Working with community partners in Fulton County, Ga., the PICH Program sponsored a workshop to teach educators the benefits of increased physical activity and trained them to plan accredited Physical Education activities for students. The teachers are now working with officials to approve their proposals.



## CHALLENGE

Research has shown that specific enhancements to Physical Education classes can effectively increase levels of physical activity and improve physical fitness among children and adolescents. Scant research exists on the amount of physical activity Fulton County elementary and secondary students receive. However, in the State of Georgia only 40% of K-12 students report levels of physical activity that comply with recommended levels. The PICH

Program has set a goal of increasing the number of K-12 schools in Fulton County with enhanced, comprehensive physical activity opportunities for students through daily recess; intramural and club sports; and walking or biking to and from school. But first, teachers must be educated about the research regarding the benefits of Physical Education opportunities and trained to incorporate research-based P.E. programs into an already-packed schoolday schedule.

## YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

You can help Fulton County schools combat child obesity by joining or creating a Wellness Council and working to add more physical activity to the school day and healthier food options at lunchtime. Be a role model by incorporating healthy foods into meals and snacks, and encouraging others to follow suit through Facebook posts, school newsletter articles and PTA presentations. Email the PICH Program at [pich.grant@fultoncountyga.gov](mailto:pich.grant@fultoncountyga.gov) to find out how to offer your ideas and energy to our efforts.

*"With the extremely high obesity rate nationally and within Georgia, P.E. is extremely important to our youth. I love the work I'm doing with them because it helps their minds as well as their bodies and they will have longer, healthier lives."*

- Christopher Rice, Teacher

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## SOLUTION

To equip teachers to introduce enhanced physical activities into their curricula, the PICH Program partnered with the Atlanta Regional Commission, Fulton County Schools, Georgia Health Policy Center, HealthMPowers and Georgia Department of Education, using funds from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to create a two-day workshop for 80 elementary and middle school teachers, representing 38 schools. They learned about research on the health and academic benefits of increased physical activity for children and adolescents. Additionally, the teachers were trained to implement research-based curricula incorporating moderate to vigorous physical activities for children and teens.

## RESULTS

The teachers in the PICH-sponsored training came away committed to building Physical Education activities into the school day in order to improve the health and well-being of children and teens. Several of the teachers have proposed Phys Ed activities to be added to curricula. They include active roll calls, teacher-created games and other elements that follow research-verified and accredited lesson plans and curriculum programs, including SPARK, FIVE FOR LIFE, EPEC, CATCH, Power Up!/Energy Balance and SHAPE. The proposals are being reviewed by school administrators for incorporation into the schoolday activities. Additionally, with the help of Georgia Health Policy Center, two elementary schools applied for and received a Georgia SHAPE grant to develop curriculum enhancements in the 2015-16 school year.

## SUSTAINING SUCCESS

As a part of this initiative, beyond the curriculum additions the teachers are proposing, the Fulton County PICH team is facilitating the creation of school Wellness Councils comprised of teachers, students, parents, administrators and concerned citizens. The Councils will collaborate to implement changes in the school district curriculum and approved menus, where increased physical activity and healthy food options can be realized and sustained. Elementary and middle schools across the County are signing on to implement these evidence-based strategies that will reduce chronic disease and help to create healthy lifestyles among more active kids. By the end of PICH implementation, the program will have impacted over 15,000 school-aged kids.