Program Encourages Kids to Stay Active at School

The Challenge: One-quarter of Wisconsin high school students and 29 percent of 2- to 4-year-olds participating in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program are overweight or obese. Low levels of physical activity contribute to this growing health concern, and schools are an obvious partner for increasing activity levels among children because they spend so much of their time there. Traditionally, schools have relied on physical education classes to address students’ activity needs; however, these programs are greatly underfunded and do not provide enough time or training for the classes to truly impact students’ lives.

Project Goals: The goal of this planning grant was to pilot three strategies from the evidence-based Active & Healthy Schools Program within three elementary schools in northwest Wisconsin. The schools were chosen to represent small, medium and large districts in rural and low-income areas of the state. The strategies were active recess, active energy breaks in the classroom and increased physical education minutes. Project leaders sought to demonstrate increased physical fitness levels through pre- and post-fitness measures by using pedometers and Fitness Gram, a tool that assesses fitness and activity levels.

Results: Based on PACER (progressive aerobic cardiovascular endurance run) scores and pedometer steps, students at all three schools demonstrated an increased level of fitness and activity during the school day as a result of the Active & Healthy Schools program. The students responded well to energy breaks and after implementing these breaks in the classroom, teachers saw student engagement increase and behavior issues decrease. Students also were more on task and focused on their lessons. The structured and active recesses eliminated many discipline problems on the playground and kept students motivated to move during the entire recess, thus improving their overall health.