

# PUTTING STUDENTS INTO MOTION

## TIPS FOR HEALTHY CHILDREN

Helping children become healthier starts at home.

While schools are stepping up exercise routines in an effort to curb climbing obesity rates, parents have a large role in ensuring children are healthier.

1. Set a good example. If you aren't active, why should your kids be?
2. Instead of taking the car to the store, walk or ride bikes with your kids.
3. Instead of having the weekly family outing to the movies, go to the park instead.
4. Have birthday parties at parks, water parks, the Discovery Zone, skating rinks and other places where your kids can run, jump and play.
5. Do things with your kids that are fun for both of you. Go swimming, hiking, ride bikes, jump rope, tag, kickball, catch etc.

Source: PreventDisease.com

BY CAROLINE GRECH  
Staff Writer

York Region schools are telling their students to "sweat a little bit more, a little more often".

A recent initiative by the province aims to have children get fit by adding 20 minutes to their daily exercise routine.

Prompted by an Ontario Medical Association report earlier this month showing child obesity rates have almost doubled between 1981 and 1996, exercise routines are becoming the norm in the schools.

The report showed the obesity rate for boys between two and 16 has increased from 15 to 29 per cent. Obesity rates for girls of the same age group rose from 15 to 24 per cent.

While some York Region schools have already injected everything from jumping jacks to chair aerobics into their daily routines, all schools in Ontario are expected to join in by the end of the school year.

According to Education Ministry standards, students should be getting 150 minutes of vigorous

exercise a week, which includes regular gym classes.

While many are lauding the merits of getting students moving to a healthier lifestyle, gym class can be an uncomfortable place for students who aren't athletic.

Curriculum changes made in 1988 take the focus away from athletic ability, making gym class inclusive for everyone, said Heather Sears, the public board's curriculum consultant.

"We want to ensure they have fun. They don't necessarily have to be on the basketball team to be fit," Ms Sears said.

Creating games that are more co-operative than competitive helps foster inclusiveness, Julie Anderson, a Grade 6 teacher at Michael Cranny Elementary School in Maple, said.

"Marks are based on their participation, not on one's athletic ability or skills," Ms Anderson said.

The Maple elementary school has been using this approach for three years and there has been a noticeable impact on students, Ms Anderson said.

"It's become part of what they know and because they enjoy it, they will incorporate it into their daily lives," Ms Anderson explained, adding without the fitness breaks, children are noticeably more lethargic.

Exercise to music has become a part of the daily routine following the morning announcements and at the end of the day at W.J. Watson Public School in Keswick.

"Our school is unique in that we are doing something over the announcements in the morning," teacher Janis Waters said.

Fitness ambassadors go into each classroom to guide exercise. To keep things interesting, songs are changed to keep students from being bored. Popular selections include Eye of the Tiger and I Would Walk 500 Miles.

Other schools also work music into their exercise routines.

"We would just follow the leader and do the exercise, it's fun," Paul Moroz, a Grade 7 student at Wind

ham Ridge Public School in Oak Ridges, said.

Other students welcome the chance to be more active at school.

"It is a good idea because, it gives us a chance to get more physically active and it's fun," Grade 6 Charles Garnier student Joey Marando added.

While the Richmond Hill 11 year-old is already active, recently completing his first five-kilometre race and playing soccer and hockey, he still thinks the extra exercise in class is a good thing.

"Sometimes in class, you're sitting down for so long and it gets distracting, but if you get a break, it helps," Joey said.

He credits his parents for setting a good example.

Joey's mother, Darlene Marando is an avid runner. Physical activity has always been a part of the routine for her entire family and,

W.J. Watson Public School student Gillian Herney (left), brother Chris and Erin Arbutnot work out to music. The Keswick school has made physical activity set to music part of the morning announcements for the past four years.

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