

POLICY INTERVENTION BRIEFS > PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INTERVENTION: PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROMOTION



- The following brief reports the effects of physical activity promotion policies on the reduction of childhood obesity prevalence in the state of Louisiana, from an evidence-based modeling program.
- The physical activity promotion policy intervention includes the placement, pricing, and targeted local advertising of physical activity (PA) opportunities in communities, as well as mass media and social marketing campaigns to promote PA and active transportation.

Policy Goals

- Increase awareness of PA opportunities and make them accessible, affordable, and safe for all residents.
- Promote active transportation to school and to nearby destinations.
- Increase the number of children and youth meeting PA recommendations.

What Does the Research Tell Us?

- Louisiana youth are falling short of federal guidelines for aerobic PA (24.4% meet recommendations),¹¹¹ vigorous PA (34.0%),¹⁴⁵ and muscle-strengthening activities (40.8%).¹¹¹
- Physically active children and youth have higher levels of cardiorespiratory endurance and muscular strength, lower body fatness, more favorable cardiovascular and metabolic disease risk profiles, enhanced bone health and reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression.¹⁴⁴
- Physical activity levels decline as young people age.¹¹¹
- There is a need for evaluation of PA promotion policies to determine their impact and effectiveness in reducing the prevalence of childhood obesity.^{39,153,163-165}

Current Policy Environment in Louisiana

- There are no active statewide policies that provide funds or personnel to design and implement a mass media campaign or other promotional/marketing strategy to promote PA opportunities.
- Measures to support active transportation, especially biking and walking, have made headway in the legislature.^{166,167}
 - A Senate Concurrent Resolution creating a Complete Streets work group was passed in 2009 that recognizes the need for Louisiana transportation authorities to assume responsibility for creating safer, more accessible roadways for pedestrians and cyclists.¹⁵⁵ This workgroup published a detailed report with recommendations in 2010¹⁵⁶ and was re-created in 2012.¹⁵⁷
 - House Bill No. 725 (2009) directed the Louisiana Highway Safety Commission to engage in a public awareness campaign to educate motorists and bicyclists of the 3-foot passing zone.^{168,169}
 - In the 2009 and 2010 Regular Session, legislators passed laws relating to bicycle safety (e.g. prohibiting harassment of bicyclists) and infrastructure funding.¹⁶⁹⁻¹⁷²

What is Active Transportation?

“Active transportation is any self-propelled, human-powered mode of transportation, such as walking or bicycling.”¹⁷³

Children who walk or bicycle to school have higher daily levels of physical activity and better cardiovascular fitness than do children who do not actively commute to school.¹⁷⁴

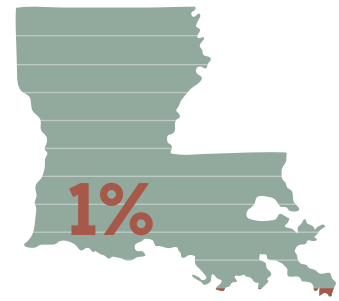
“Promotional and educational programs help increase rates of biking and walking to school.^{175-177[178]} Parental safety concerns about traffic tend to be a common obstacle to biking and walking to school,^{179-181[182]} but addressing safety behaviors and concerns through educational programs appears to be a promising strategy.”¹⁸³

WAYS TO SUPPORT Physical Activity Promotion

- Endorse school wellness by creating or implementing wellness programs and PA groups.
- Promote active transportation and host pedestrian/cyclist safety education events.
- Implement mass media campaigns to promote PA opportunities in communities.
- Increase signage in schools and communities to increase use of facilities, parks, and green space.
- Create incentives for using community park and recreation facilities, participating in competitive and non-competitive recreational activities, and using public or active transportation to/from home and school or nearby destinations.

Achieving Maximum Intervention Results

- Because Louisiana does not have state-specific data relating to physical activity promotion policies, the national level (1%) was used for the initial conditions setting. The national level reflects a severe lack of sustainable PA promotion policies across the United States.
- Maximum policy intervention (100%) would involve a sustained, targeted, highly visible media campaign; local communication to increase awareness of PA opportunities across the state; convenient and visible placement of options in communities; and affordable pricing to utilize the PA opportunities.



Projected Effect on Louisiana's Childhood Obesity Prevalence

PRISM Results: Can a Policy Intervention to Promote Physical Activity Reduce the Prevalence of Childhood Obesity?				
Policy Strength	Maximum (100%)	Maximum (100%)	Moderate (50%)	Moderate (50%)
Year Implemented	2013	2016	2013	2016
% Change [ROU [^]]	↓ 7% [3-12%]	↓ 5% [2-8%]	↓ 3% [2-7%]	↓ 3% [2-6%]

[^] ROU refers to the Range of Uncertainty determined by the PRISM sensitivity analysis
 Note: The symbol ↓ signifies that the percent change is negative, and the percent represents a decrease.

- Policies that promote PA may result in a 5% [Range of Uncertainty: 2-8%] drop in childhood obesity prevalence if the full intervention is implemented by 2016.
- There is a significant need to evaluate policies related to PA promotion beyond the school environment to determine long-term effects at the population-level.

Recommended amount of daily physical activity for children and adolescents^{144,184,185}

5-17 year olds: 60 minutes per day
 Youth should incorporate each of these activities at least 3 days per week:

- 20 minutes moderate- to vigorous-intensity
- muscle-strengthening
- bone-strengthening

Implementing the Policy

Although policies that promote PA are relatively new and will require extensive time and resources to remain sustainable, the health benefits of PA on children's health are continuously re-confirmed as a top priority.¹⁴⁹ There are many existing initiatives to promote PA statewide, and many community groups and government entities are actively working to spread the word about the benefits of regular PA. It may take a few years to gather support for a statewide PA marketing effort to materialize, but Louisianans appear to be on board in the promotion of PA, exercise, and fitness, especially for kids.

Schools and parents can be proactive in promoting PA for children in their neighborhoods. The Safe Routes to School Program exists within the LA Department of Transportation and Development. Although there are no policies endorsing or requiring schools to participate, the program provides grant money to schools who want to ensure that students of all abilities can safely walk or cycle to school. The goal of this program is to increase the number of students actively commuting to and from school.¹⁸⁶ Additionally, schools and parents can work with local parks and recreation departments to advertise competitive and non-competitive sports and recreation programs at schools, community centers, and libraries. Because parks, recreation departments, and commercial recreational facilities are responsible for their own marketing and advertising, many youth may not be aware of opportunities that exist in their neighborhoods.

! "To increase physical activity, today's children need safe routes to walk and bike ride to school, parks, playgrounds and community centers where they can play after school, and activities like sports, dance or fitness programs that are exciting and challenging enough to keep them engaged."¹⁸⁷
 ~Let's Move! (www.letsmove.gov)

For more information, please contact **Dr. Stephanie Broyles** at Pennington Biomedical Research Center

(225) 763-2760 | prism@pbrc.edu

To view and download the full report, please visit: www.pbrc.edu/prism