

# facts about: physical activity and academics

New Mexico's Prevention Research Center Fact Series

## research shows

- Students who participate in moderate to high levels of physical activity in school demonstrate better academic performance—even when physical education time cuts into academic coursework. Better academic performance includes:
  - improved math, reading and writing scores,
  - increased concentration and alertness,
  - fewer behavioral problems in class,
  - reduced levels of anxiety and stress.
- Preliminary findings recently released indicate schools show gains in math, language and reading test scores, over time, when more students participate in routine physical activity. Schools with the lowest percent of students participating in physical activity were the lowest performing schools.

Sources: Dwyer et al., *Community Health Studies*, 1979, 196-202. Sallis et al., *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 1999, 127-134. Shephard et al., in *Children and Sport*, 1984, 58-63.

Sources: Hanson & Austin, *Student Health Risks, Resilience, and Academic Performance in California: Year 2 Report*, 2003.

## recommendations

### for Physical Activity:

- Children should get at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day.
- Adolescents should get at least 30–60 minutes of physical activity per day. At least twice a week, some of these activities should be strength training and flexibility activities.

Sources: National Association for Sport & Physical Education (NASPE), 2004 (in press).

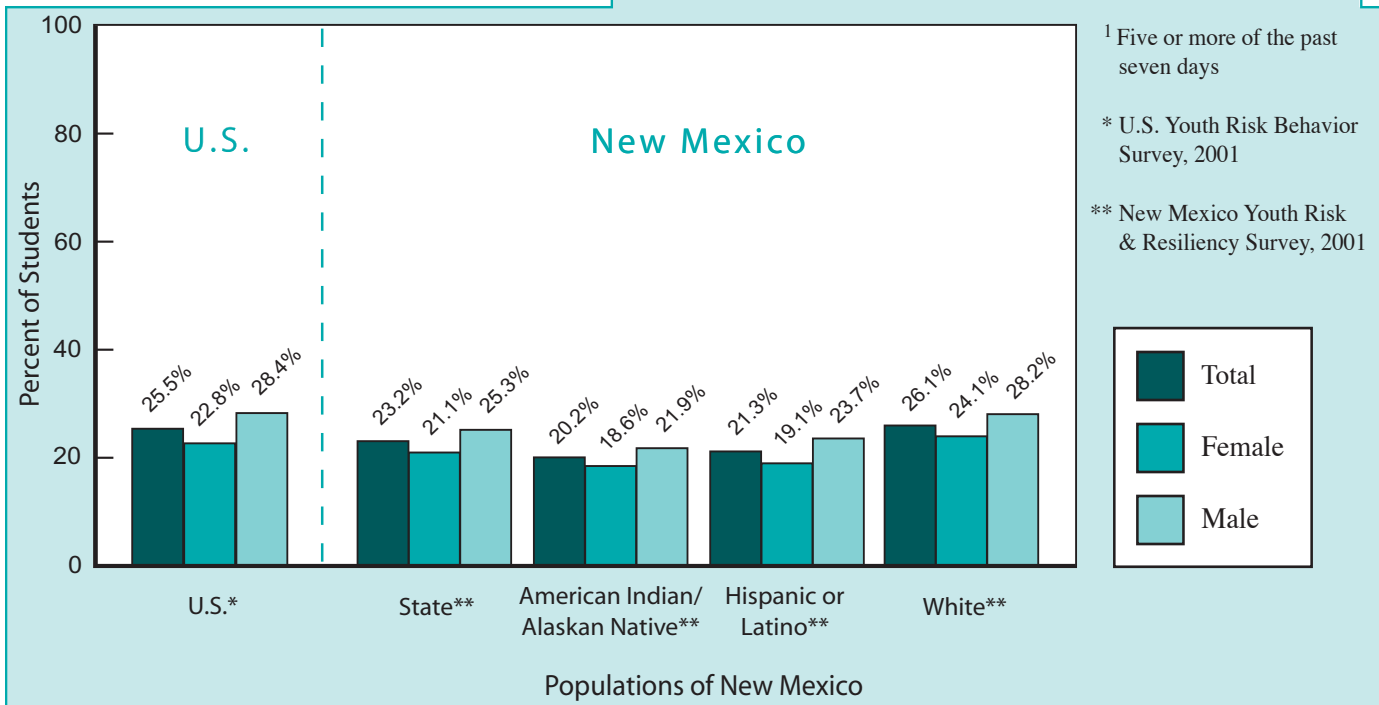
Sources: Sallis & Patrick, *Pediatric Exercise Science*, 1994, 302-14. Cavill et al., *Pediatric Exercise Science*, 2001, 12-25.

### for Physical Education in Schools:

- School-based physical education is a strongly recommended approach to increasing physical activity among youth.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, *MMWR*, 2001, 1-16.

## Percent of high school students who participate in moderate physical activity on most<sup>1</sup> days of the week



# physical activity and academics

## in their own words

### Teachers

"Lack of exercise [is a problem]. We definitely need more... PE time, because I don't think the students are getting the exercise they need....But I do know as a teacher, if I take the kids outside every morning just for a brisk little ten minute walk, they do so much better in the classroom and especially before tests."

--New Mexico teacher, 2002

### Students

"Running helps me learn more in class," said one student. Another said that, "As I get more fit, I feel stronger and more ready to learn every day."

Sources: Anonymous. *California Educator*, November 2002.

### Parents

A 2000 survey of parents done by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) found that:

- 95% think regular, daily physical activity helps children do better academically,
- 95% want physical education to be part of a K-12 school curriculum,
- 67% say they're willing to pay higher taxes to provide physical and nutrition education classes.

Sources: AAHPERD. *Parents' Views of Children's Health & Fitness: A Summary of Results. A Survey Conducted by Opinion Research Corporation International of Princeton, NJ, 2000.*



### In New Mexico,

almost half (48%) of high school students did not take physical education class in 1999. In 2000, approximately 41% of middle school students attended physical education classes *less than 3 days per week.*

Sources: NM Department of Health & State Department of Education, *1999 New Mexico Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Report of State Results* and *New Mexico 2000 Middle School Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Report of State Results.*

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For a full list of sources cited in this Fact Sheet, see <http://hsc.unm.edu/chpdp> or contact: Christine Hollis at [chollis@salud.unm.edu](mailto:chollis@salud.unm.edu)

*A 1991 survey of principals, conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, showed that most principals feel recess to be "healthy and productive," and say children who have recess are more alert later in the day.*

Sources: Caterino & Polak. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 1999, 245-248.



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