SPARK PE
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

Purpose
To encourage health-related physical education (PE) by maximizing physical activity participation during school activities to improve student fitness, skills and enjoyment

Target Population
Students in pre-kindergarten to 12th grade

Goals
• To create, implement and evaluate programs that promote lifelong wellness
• To improve the health of children and adolescents by disseminating evidence-based physical activity and nutrition programs that provide curricula, staff development, follow-up support, and equipment to teachers

Years in Operation
1989 – present

Results
• Up to 80 percent of schools that adopted SPARK PE reported sustained use up to four years later.
• Program outcomes show that SPARK PE had positive effects on quality and quantity of teacher instruction of PE, physical activity in class, and components of physical fitness, sports-related skills, and academic achievement.
• Schools with no previous standard PE program in place were more likely to continue using SPARK than schools with a PE curriculum.
• Physically active teachers and teachers who had not received PE-related academic credits in recent years were more likely to continue using SPARK PE.21

Funding
SPARK PE was originally developed by a team at San Diego State University and funded by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute from 1989 to 1996. SPARK curricula, equipment and training can now be purchased by communities and schools on the SPARK Web site.

Key Partners
Teacher Education Program, University of California, San Diego; College of Education, California State University, San Marcos; Center for Research in Disease Prevention Stanford University School of Medicine; Department of Preventive Medicine, University of Tennessee, Memphis; West Virginia University Physical Education Department; California Obesity Prevention Initiative; Project LEAN; SPORTIME International; San Diego State University Foundation; National School Fitness Foundation; American Council on Exercise; Governor's
What Works and Why

A recent study evaluating the sustainability of SPARK found that up to 80 percent of schools that had received SPARK curriculum books, training and follow-up had sustained use of the program up to four years later. Schools using SPARK were found to have more frequent PE classes, which translated directly into enhancing students’ physical activity and opportunities for skill practice. SPARK encourages support from school principals and administration, and schools that garnered high amounts of support from these stakeholders had higher rates of physical education. SPARK also requires schools to provide sufficient PE equipment. Schools participating in the study used PE equipment more often and maintained the equipment well.

Structure and Operations

SPARK focuses on the four main school levels: early childhood, elementary, middle school, and high school. Additionally, SPARK has an after-school program and a Healthy and Wise Middle School Coordinated Health Program. SPARK is also researching and developing a SPARK Coordinated Health Program.

The SPARK curriculum covers three main areas:

- Physical education — This program component consists of 24 core activity units; suggestions for managing children in PE classes; and instructions for inclement weather activities, strength and conditioning warm-up, and a fitness self-testing program.

- Classroom curriculum — This program consists of teaching behavioral self-management skills that would assist students in developing regular physical activity skills outside of school.

- Staff development program — This program enhances teachers’ commitment to health-related PE, helps teachers understand SPARK curricular units and activities, develops teachers’ management and instructional skills needed for effective program implementation, and assists teachers in overcoming barriers to full implementation. The staff development program also further develops the skills of PE specialists and provides basic PE skills for classroom teachers.

The curriculum is also tailored to meet the needs of the specific age groups targeted by SPARK.

Barriers to Success

In a study performed on the effectiveness of the elementary school program, teachers viewed the self-management curriculum less positively than the physical education curriculum. Teachers were observed implementing an average of 65 percent of curriculum elements, which may have contributed to the limited effects of the self-management program.

For More Information

Additional information is available online: http://www.sparkpe.org