The Challenges We Face: Estimates show that only about half of youth in the United States meet the current Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommendation of at least 60 minutes of daily vigorous or moderate-intensity physical activity. Given that physical inactivity affects health throughout the lifetime, it may not be surprising that children and adolescents face growing health risks. A lack of physical activity makes youth more likely to develop obesity, diabetes, heart disease, colon and breast cancer, high blood pressure, anxiety, and depression.

Taking a Whole-of-School Approach to Physical Activity

Schools traditionally support the health and well-being of students from all socio-economic backgrounds by providing services such as immunizations and meals. Children spend more than half of all waking hours in schools; therefore, schools are an ideal setting for physical activity. Teachers, principals, administrators, superintendents, students, and parents can all play a role in ensuring that youth are as active as possible inside school buildings, on outdoor grounds and playgrounds, and on streets and pathways surrounding schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TODAY’S REALITY</th>
<th>TOMORROW’S VISION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Youth are sedentary for most of the school day, as well as the hours just before and after school. Few students are active on their way to and from school. As children move from elementary to high school they become less active.</td>
<td>All youth participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day, while they are on school grounds or on their way to and from school. Students walk and bike to and from school on safe and accessible routes.</td>
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<td>Boys are more likely than girls, and non-Hispanic students are more likely than Hispanic students, to meet the recommendation of 60 minutes per day of physical activity.</td>
<td>Schools provide equal opportunities for all students to be active before or after school in a variety of programs that promote enjoyment of movement, including intra- and extramural sports.</td>
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<td>Schools have cut time for recess, physical education, and breaks in order to make more time for math and reading courses and test preparation.</td>
<td>Children perform better in academics as a result of being physically active. Physical activity is considered by school officials to be foundational to all other learning and is prioritized in the school environment.</td>
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<td>Few states have laws that require students to meet national recommendations for daily or weekly minutes of physical education, and schools seldom follow non-mandated state guidelines for physical education participation.</td>
<td>State laws hold schools accountable for providing the recommended amount of physical activity for all students.</td>
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Why should we strive to bring this vision to life?

Evidence shows that...

Physical activity is key to physical and mental health:
- Lack of activity increases the risk of heart disease, colon and breast cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, and osteoporosis.
- Children who are physically active on a regular basis have improved self-esteem, greater social interaction amongst peers, and are more goal-oriented, while those who are less active are more likely to experience anxiety and depression.
- Sedentary behaviors, like sitting or watching TV, have health risks of their own, which are independent from the health risks of physical inactivity.
- Children who are physically active are more likely to become physically active adults with fewer health risks.

Physical activity is key to academic achievement:
- Children who are more active show greater attention and perform better on standardized tests.
- Increasing the time in the school day that is set aside for recess, physical education class, or classroom physical activity can improve students’ academic performance.

How could this vision come to life in your community?

PARENTS
- Ask teachers, principals, and superintendents what they are doing to make sure children receive the minimum amount of physical activity needed each day.
- Mobilize other parents to work with school officials to create and implement a plan for how schools and communities can promote physical activity.

TEACHERS
- Prepare lessons that encourage students to stand, move around the classroom, and regularly integrate movement into learning.
- Engage students in structured activities that promote movement during recess, breaks, and before and after school programs.

SCHOOLS, PRINCIPALS, DISTRICTS, AND SUPERINTENDENTS
- Adopt joint or shared use agreements that allow school facilities to be used for physical activity programs during non-school hours.
- Offer extra- and intramural sports and physical activity clubs before or after school that are accessible for all students and do not require fees for participation.
- Use funding for athletics to support programs that reach the greatest number of students.

COMMUNITIES, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, AND URBAN PLANNERS
- Incorporate traffic calming into community planning to ensure safe routes to school.
- Build paths and sidewalks that lead directly to schools from neighborhoods.
- Adopt school siting policies that encourage new schools to be located in residential neighborhoods.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
- Designate physical education as a core subject.
- Establish competency requirements for all teachers in physical education.
- Conduct an inventory of available facilities and opportunities for physical activity across schools and districts to identify disparities.