

# Physical Development and Health of Young Learners: A Resource Set

**New York State Education  
Department**



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The Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core outlines early learning expectations linked to K-12 standards, organized by key domains of learning. The NYSED, Office of Early Learning is developing a series of resource sets to assist teachers and administrators as they reflect on program practices and supports in each of the key domains. This set provides background information, ideas for planning to support physical development and health, and a teacher planning tool. The set also includes a school-wide reflection tool for administrators and teams to plan and implement program improvement, resources, and supports.

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**Part 1:  
Teacher  
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**1. Key Points about Physical Development and Health**

This overview provides an introduction and background information about the importance of young children’s physical development and health. It includes research-based links to children’s academic and cognitive development and overall well-being. It can be used as the basis for discussion among teacher teams, mentors, coaches, and/or administrators.

**2. Planning Time to Support Physical Development and Health**

This tip sheet provides ideas for building more time to support children’s physical development and health. It includes ideas for incorporating opportunities during the regular school day and for designing special events and opportunities.

**3. Planning to Support Children’s Physical Development and Health Tool**

This tool provides details about the learning goals for children’s physical development and health. It provides specific ideas to help teachers develop a plan to build learning environments and opportunities that support young children’s physical development, physical fitness, health and well-being, and health and safety.

**Part 2:  
Administrator  
Tools**

**4. School-wide Reflection Worksheet: Program Improvement, Resources and Supports**

The School-wide Reflection Worksheet is designed for school leaders and teacher teams to reflect on the systems and supports that promote physical development and health opportunities that are aligned to the Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core.

**5. References and Resources**

This series was developed by the New York State Education Department, Office of Early Learning, in partnership with the Northeast Comprehensive Center.

For more resources in this series, visit [www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/earlylearning)



NORTHEAST COMPREHENSIVE CENTER

# 1. Key Points about Physical Development and Health

## Introduction

Most preschool classrooms are active spaces – children moving around from center to center, exploring the outdoors, using movement through dance and gestures and just squiggling! However, many teachers are concerned about ensuring adequate physical development and health opportunities without sacrificing cognitive and academic learning. As the New York State’s *Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core* asserts, research has shown strong links between healthy eating, physical activity, and improved academic achievement. The good news is that multiple opportunities can be built into the daily curriculum.

The New York State Education Department’s *Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core* outlines four categories of physical development and health learning goals:

Physical Development	Physical Fitness	Health and Well-Being	Health and Safety
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Using senses and sensory information</li><li>•Demonstrating coordination and control of fine muscles</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Including engaging in physical activities with increasing dexterity and endurance (running, hopping, catching, balance, flexibility)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Personal care skills</li><li>•Increasing awareness of healthy habits</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Demonstrating awareness and understanding of safety rules</li></ul>

These categories provide a framework for teachers and leaders to plan a combination of discrete and integrated opportunities to foster children’s physical development. For example, teachers can plan a daily schedule that provides ample time for planned physical activities and outings, incorporates opportunities for large and small muscle movement, promotes healthy habits in authentic ways, and builds a sense of well-being through routines, curriculum design, and instructional strategies.

As with all learning, teachers should plan instruction based on what children know and are able to do rather than pushing kids who aren’t ready or not challenging kids who are.

Prekindergarten programs include a screening when children are enrolled that provides basic information about their physical development. However, the beginning of the year is just that...the beginning. Teachers should observe children continuously over the year to guide instructional planning and determine what they need.

## Did you know?

In 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published a resource highlighting the connection between health and wellness and academic achievement titled, *Health and Academic Achievement*. The booklet provides an evidence base linking health and wellness to academic achievement; messages for states, schools, parents, and students; and specific actions to support healthy eating and physical activity in schools. The CDC notes:

- Inadequate nutrition impacts student learning in multiple ways, including lower test scores, lower grades, increased absenteeism, and decreased cognitive performance
- Physical activity and fitness are associated with improved cognition (e.g., concentration, memory)
- Participation in physical education in school is associated with better grades and on-task behavior
- Increased time spent for physical education during school does not negatively affect students' academic achievement
- Brief physical activity breaks (e.g., 5-10 minutes) are associated with improved cognitive performance, classroom behavior, and educational outcomes

If you think about these findings in the context of very young children, it may spark some ideas for planning opportunities for children to be physically active.

Kids are sitting still (or expected to sit still) now more than ever before, whether as part of a daily commute, in front of screens, or during school. The goal is to build daily schedules that meet children's developmental needs, including physical development.

### According to the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), 3 and 4 year old children should:

- Engage in at least 60 minutes of accumulated – and up to several hours – of unstructured physical activity each day, and should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time, except when sleeping
- Develop competence in fundamental motor skills that serve as building blocks for more complex movement tasks and activity
- Have access to indoor and outdoor areas that meet or exceed recommended safety standards for performing large-muscle activities
- Be in the care of knowledgeable adults who are aware of the importance of physical activity and facilitate children's opportunities

## 2. Planning Time to Support Physical Development and Health

Considering the goals outlined by the *Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core* and NASPE, teachers and administrators should plan time to support physical development and health. This can be done in a multitude of ways, which are outlined below.

Opportunities for Daily Activities During the School Day	
<b>Recess</b>	This is scheduled time during the day that is a completely free time for kids to play and goof around! Typically, recess occurs outside on a playground or other outdoor area. However, recess can occur indoors if weather prohibits outdoor play. **Special note: recess should never be taken away as a punishment for poor behavior.
<b>Physical Education</b>	This is a scheduled time during the day that is often a discrete class with specified learning goals. This is a great opportunity for teachers to organize games or active play based on observations of where children need extra support. Physical Education class can also include student organized active play, group games, and individual games.
<b>Extended Physical Activity Breaks</b>	These breaks can be built right into the daily schedule or occur spontaneously to take advantage of opportunities to get kids moving. For example, a dance party, morning stretch, a walk around the school or outside when it's nice.
<b>Responsive Break-time Activities</b>	Responsive break-time activities are a tool that teachers can use to "plug-in" break times (e.g., 2-5 minutes) as needed throughout the day when they notice children need it. For example, movement during transitions to another activity, to redirect student behavior, or in response to observation (e.g., squiggly and squirmy kids during group activity).

Special Events and Activities	
<b>Theme or Field Days</b>	An organized school/program event with organized games and activities.
<b>Family Fun Days</b>	An organized event with family and friends at a park or an event at the school or center that showcases healthy habits and ways to foster young children's physical development.
<b>Informational Fliers</b>	Family-friendly monthly information and/or resource flier of activities/events for families (e.g., farm days, events in the community, a "best playground" in the neighborhood contest, showcase of healthy and easy meals, referrals to health care or nutritional support organizations).
<b>Clubs and Classes</b>	Specialized clubs or classes that are kid-friendly, walking club for students and families, after school yoga class, cooking with a healthy flair, school garden club, etc.

### 3. Planning to Support Children’s Physical Development and Health Tool

#### Directions

This tool is designed to help you reflect on the Physical Development and Health learning standards and provide ideas for future planning. The first column provides a description of how children may demonstrate learning in the category. The middle column provides some instructional ideas for supporting children’s learning. The last column is for teachers to write notes to themselves for building a plan to support children’s growth in the category. The last column also includes the following reflections questions to guide planning:

- *How am I doing in this area?*
- *What do I need to learn?*
- *What can I start right now?*
- *What do I need additional support to do?*

#### Integrating Across Domains

As you work through the tool, you will find several ways that the Physical Development and Health learning domain crosses over to other domains of learning. The connections and integration opportunities with Communication, Language and Literacy and Mathematics are endless (e.g., narrating action words, developing/dictating safety signs, charting progress, sharing relevant books, providing new vocabulary words, interacting and responding, expressing feelings etc.), but don’t forget about the other domains! For example, using music to support Physical Development links to the arts in Cognition and Knowledge of the World; playing active games and games with rules to support Physical Fitness links to building relationships with others in Social and Emotional Development; talking about things that are healthy and unhealthy to support Health and Well-being links to living things in Cognition and Knowledge of the World; and, learning about safety links to civics, citizenship, and government in Cognition and Knowledge of the World. As you plan play-based, developmentally-appropriate learning experiences to support children’s physical development and health, remember that there are numerous opportunities to integrate across the domains in learning.

## PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH

Creating opportunity throughout the day to support young children's health and well-being.

*Physical development refers to the development of the senses and large and small muscles. Children learn at different rates, but it usually happens in a specific sequence. Teachers can observe how children are developing and provide opportunities to support healthy growth.*

# Physical Development

### CHILDREN demonstrate by...

- Using their senses (sights, smells, sounds, tastes, and textures) to assist and guide learning
- Using their sensory information to plan and carry out movement
- Showing coordination and control of large muscles
- Combining a sequence of large motor skills with and without the use of equipment
- Showing eye-hand coordination and dexterity needed to manipulate objects

### TEACHERS support by...

- Understanding general physical development milestones
- Planning adequate time for active learning experiences and play
- Encouraging and joining in children's active play
- Playing movement/sing-along games, such as "Hokey-Pokey," "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes," and "Wheels on the Bus"
- Playing games that require balance and coordination, such as Red Light-Green Light Hopscotch and Simon Says
- Offering a wide range of equipment, such as balls and bean bags, ride-on toys, wagons, hula hoops
- Incorporating opportunities for fine muscle practice, such as molding clay, chopping vegetables, drawing, building and taking apart, stringing, beading, cutting with scissors
- Building a movement activity center where children can practice dance moves, walking a balance beam line on the floor, using soft balls/bean bags to practice making baskets, yoga and stretching, soft-ball bowling games

### Plan for Action

*How am I doing in this area? What do I need to learn? What can I start right now? What do I need additional support to do?*

## PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH

Creating opportunity throughout the day to support young children's health and well-being.

*Physical fitness refers to a general state of health and fitness, particularly in terms of strength, endurance, and flexibility. In early childhood, it's important to provide play-based, developmentally appropriate learning experiences for young children to develop healthy habits.*

# Physical Fitness

### CHILDREN demonstrate by...

Engaging in a variety of physical fitness activities:

- Large motor activities in increasingly longer periods of time as skill and endurance develops
- Exploring, practicing, and performing skills sets such as throwing, pushing, pulling, catching, balancing, etc.
- Participating in activities designed to strengthen major muscle groups
- Participating in activities to promote balance and flexibility

### TEACHERS support by...

- Observing children's fitness levels and planning and preparing developmentally appropriate, child-centered opportunities for activity
- Providing opportunities for vigorous to moderate physical activity throughout the day, everyday
- Helping children recognize their own faster heart rate and deeper breathing when they are physically active
- Structuring activities that raise the heart-rate like tag, basketball, races, rigorous dancing, playing on equipment
- Playing games that encourage flexibility and balance such as imitation games of animal movements, follow the leader, slow motion dancing, yoga
- Participating in physical activities along with children
- Providing fun, non-competitive activities that encourage and allow participation by all students

### Plan for Action

*How am I doing in this area? What do I need to learn? What can I start right now? What do I need additional support to do?*

## PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH

Creating opportunity throughout the day to support young children's health and well-being.

*Health and well-being refers to the development of healthy routines – like building independence, getting adequate rest, choosing foods, and exercising. Gradually and with support, teachers can provide examples and opportunities for children to develop healthy habits.*

# Health and Well-Being

### CHILDREN demonstrate by...

- Growing independence in using personal hygiene skills (e.g., hand washing, brushing teeth, toileting) and self-help skills (e.g., dressing, cleaning up)
- Recognizing and communicating when experiencing symptoms of illness
- Recognizing importance of eating right and resting
- Talking about food choices
- Relating healthy behaviors to good health
- Describing roles of health providers (e.g., doctor, dentist)

### TEACHERS support by...

- Modeling healthy practices (e.g., talk about the healthy snack you are eating, share your favorite form of exercise, talk about how you feel good with enough sleep)
- Utilizing posters and pictures that signal processes for hygiene habits
- Sharing books and photographs that facilitate conversations about expressing feelings in healthy ways; drawing pictures that illustrate feelings
- Setting up fun opportunities to introduce new foods (e.g., a blind taste-test and tie it into a math lesson by charting “thumbs up or thumbs down”)
- Planting and maintaining a school garden with support from families
- Inviting guests from the community (school nurse, hygienist, cafeteria staff) or setting up a field trip
- Designing a unit that focuses on community helpers; set up a learning center that highlights different helper roles, veterinarian, doctor, nurse, dentist, firefighters

### Plan for Action

*How am I doing in this area? What do I need to learn? What can I start right now? What do I need additional support to do?*

## PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH

Creating opportunity throughout the day to support young children's health and well-being.

*Health and safety refers to children's ability to understand and practice habits that keep them and others safe and well. In early childhood, teachers can promote health and safety habits by providing opportunities for children to practice through daily routines, special projects, activities, and learning about safe and unsafe practices.*

# Health and Safety

### CHILDREN demonstrate by...

- Verbalizing and demonstrating safety rules (e.g., no running in the hallway)
- Communicating to peers and adults when observing unsafe behavior
- Understanding safe (e.g. wearing a helmet) and unsafe (e.g., playing near a busy street) practices
- Demonstrating knowledge of bus safety
- Participating in fire evacuation drills as instructed
- Explaining how to get help in an emergency

### TEACHERS support by...

- Modeling and enacting safety rules
- Sharing books with safety themes and helper characters
- Designing learning centers to highlight safety rules
- Designing a specialized learning experience that challenge children to come up with their own safety rules and talk about them (e.g., a construction site, a neighborhood model)
- Asking authentic questions while children are engaging in play
- Engaging in games with rules
- Practicing fire drills and bus drills frequently
- Inviting guests from the community (firefighters, EMTs and police officers)
- Providing parents with materials about bus safety and other important school safety rules

### Plan for Action

*How am I doing in this area? What do I need to learn? What can I start right now? What do I need additional support to do?*

#### 4. School-wide Reflection Worksheet

Program Improvement, Resources and Supports: Language and Literacy Rich Environments				
	CURRENT STATUS			Next Steps
	Already in Place	N/A	Area to Develop	
<p>A. Program Leadership Principal/site manager:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identifies professional development, materials and other resources to support physical development and health.</li> <li>2. Ensures equitable access of materials and resources across all preschool classrooms.</li> <li>3. Is familiar with what physical development and health in preschool looks and sounds like.</li> </ol>				
<p>B. Research-Based and Effective Curriculum and Instruction in Support of State and District Standards Principals/site managers ensure that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All preschool staff receive training about physical development and health.</li> <li>2. Preschool staff have access and resources to select books and materials to support instruction.</li> <li>3. The physical space supports children’s needs for movement and activity.</li> </ol>				

	CURRENT STATUS			Next Steps
	Already in Place	N/A	Area to Develop	
<p><b>C. Supporting Teachers in the Classroom</b> Principals/site managers ensure that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1.</b> Teachers have opportunities and access to resources or specialists to strengthen physical development and health, including how to use materials and resources, engage children, and set-up learning environments.</li> <li><b>2.</b> Teachers receive feedback about their implementation of practices and techniques that support physical development and health.</li> <li><b>3.</b> Paraprofessionals and volunteers are included in training and feedback opportunities.</li> </ol>				
<p><b>D. Engaging Families and Community</b> Principals/site managers ensure that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1.</b> School/preschool program has ongoing and reciprocal communication with parents about physical development and health.</li> <li><b>2.</b> School/preschool program provides information to families in ways they understand about physical development and health and ways they can support children’s development.</li> <li><b>3.</b> School/preschool program provides paid time for staff to learn about children’s interests and activities.</li> </ol>				

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