



A Closer Look: Denver Public Schools

PEP Grant Awardee

The Carol M. White Physical Education Program (PEP) was implemented in DPS during the 2004-2005 school year and made significant changes in the middle school physical education program including the following:

- Improvements in staff development
- The adoption of the SPARK curriculum
- The purchase of curriculum supporting equipment

SPARK Curriculum Raises the Bar

The SPARK physical education curriculum is a multi-faceted approach for teaching physical education to students from kindergarten through middle school (www.sparkpe.org). It offers developmentally appropriate instruction and practice in a large variety of sports skills and fitness activities. Repetition within classes and within the different units allows students to learn and master skills effectively. SPARK emphasizes active engagement in physical activity and participation of all students during the entire class period. Activities detailed in the curriculum can be implemented in a variety of school settings irrespective of space, equipment or supply constraints. SPARK's primary emphasis is on health-related fitness activities that are designed to promote traditional physical education outcomes (e.g., the attainment of motor skills and knowledge). It also focuses on the development of healthy lifestyles.

Student Fitness Levels Improve

In DPS' middle school project, students experienced the following pre- to post-test improvements in fitness levels:

- Trunk Lift: 21%
- Aerobic Fitness: 17%

- Push-Up: 13%
- Curl-Up: 11%
- Flexibility: 5%

The SPARK curriculum, in conjunction with other related fitness and skills building instruction offered, contributed to these improvements.

Quality of Teaching Improves

Teachers also improved their quality of teaching. Comparisons between the beginning and end of the implementation period revealed significant changes in the amount of classroom time students spent in activity. One of the most significant results of the evaluation was the increase from pre- to post-SPARK implementation period in both class time spent in physical activity and the percentage of students active during class time.

Within the seven study schools, class time recorded as spent in activity increased from 29% at pre-test to an average of 66% at post-test—an increase of 37%. A significant increase was also seen from pre- to post-test in how many teachers encouraged their students during class to be physically active outside of the classroom. Whereas only 3 of 11 (27%) encouraged their students to be physically active outside of school at the pre-test time point, all 11 (100%) encouraged this at the post-test time point.

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<http://www.ed.gov/programs/whitephysed/index.html>