

SPARK and Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC):

A Resource Guide



SPARK Early Childhood (EC) is an evidence-based Physical Activity program targeting children ages 3-5 that has been proven to WORK and LAST.

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The SPARK Programs
438 Camino Del Rio South, Suite 110
San Diego, CA 92108

1. Healthy Students are Better Learners: Physical Activity & Early Learning

Preschool, recognized as the time to prepare children for kindergarten, focuses on early interventions with regard to school readiness. Connecting movement with classroom activities plays an important role in the preschool environment because children learn while they are moving and playing. Play is children's work!

Preschoolers benefit from practicing safe, developmentally appropriate movement activities in a supportive environment. It is hoped that by learning to enjoy a variety of activities children will become more confident and competent movers. Movement, thought, and language collectively form a basic understanding of movement concepts in the early stages of learning.

Through age-appropriate movement programs implemented during the critical early childhood development stage, children have the opportunity to develop a variety of basic movement, manipulative, and social skills that enhance school readiness.

2. SPARK alignment with RTT-ELC Priorities and Focused Investment Areas

SPARK supports the goals of the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge program and the effort to improve the quality of early learning and development programs for young children.

Priority 1: Promoting School Readiness for Children with High Needs

Goal: Build a system that increases the quality of Early Learning and Development Programs for Children with High Needs so that they enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

SPARK Alignment to Priority 1:

The SPARK Programs, in its commitment to the health and wellness of children, has developed the SPARK Early Childhood (EC) Physical Activity program. This program is intended to be integrated into early learning communities empowering them to adopt life-long wellness practices.

In addition to promoting healthy lifestyles, the focus of SPARK EC is to develop basic movement, manipulative, social, and personal skills at an early age. SPARK EC provides children ages 3-5 with high activity, academically integrated, enjoyable movement opportunities that foster social and motor development and enhance school readiness skills. Academic integrations are included on each lesson plan, covering art, literacy, nutrition, music, science and social studies.

SPARK EC is designed to encourage maximum participation for every child, regardless of her/his ability. Active participation and practice are the means for improving young children's movement skills and enjoyment of physical activity.

Adaptations are listed on every lesson plan and include limited space suggestions, activity variations, and inclusive strategies for children with diagnosed developmental delays and disabilities. In addition, SPARK provides teaching strategies for instructors to respond effectively to the needs of individuals and to help create a supportive and positive learning environment.

The SPARK Early Childhood (EC) program offers all of the curricula, training and other tools/ resources required to provide quality physical activity in childcare settings. The SPARK EC program being disseminated today applies the lessons learned from years of rigorous research and subsequent field-testing in the "real-world."

2. SPARK alignment with RTT-ELC Priorities and Focused Investment Areas (cont.)

Focused Investment Area C: Promoting Early Learning and Development Outcomes for Children

- 1) Developing and using statewide, high-quality Early Learning and Development Standards
- 2) Supporting effective uses of Comprehensive Assessment Systems
- 3) Identifying and addressing the health, behavioral, and development needs of Children with High Needs to improve school readiness.
- 4) Engaging and supporting families.

SPARK Alignment to Focused Investment Area C:

- 1) SPARK EC is aligned to national guidelines for early learning physical activity programs, and every lesson shows the guideline(s) addressed on the page.

SPARK is presented in scope & sequence, and provides alignment for PreK-12th grade curriculum. [Click Here](#) to view the complete Scope & Sequence. [Click Here](#) to view the SPARK state standards alignment.

[Click Here](#) to view a document showing how the SPARK Early Childhood program aligns with the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS).

- 2) SPARK EC provides program and student assessment tools and training on how to use them. Please see Section 5 to read more about the SPARK assessment tools.
- 3) SPARK EC provides field-tested curriculum, onsite staff development training, and content-matched equipment so that educators have all the tools they need to provide a quality physical activity program.

The SPARK Early Childhood Physical Activity Curriculum offers instruction and practice in a comprehensive program designed to promote motor development through increased physical activity. SPARK EC is designed to encourage maximum participation during movement time and take best advantage of developmentally appropriate activities without overwhelming children or instructors. Active engagement and practice in a positive environment are means for improving children's personal enjoyment, physical and social development, thus increasing physical activity. Educators also have opportunities to enhance lessons through the integration of other subjects. Lessons include suggestions for academic integrations including art, language arts, music, mathematics, nutrition, and science.

- 4) SPARK EC provides Family Fun Activities included in each lesson to promote physical activity at home. Family Fun Activities are available in English and Spanish.

Focused Investment Area D: A Great Early Childhood Education Workforce

- 2) Supporting Early Childhood Educators in improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

SPARK Alignment to Focused Investment Area D:

- 2) SPARK provides onsite staff development training specifically designed for Early Childhood Educators. The focus of Early Childhood staff development is to train the educator on age-appropriate activities that motivate and encourage young children to be physically active. Early Childhood Educators are eligible for SPARK Certification and a unit of credit after completing 12 hours of training. [Click Here](#) to review the goals, objectives, methodology, and outcomes of SPARK EC workshops.

SPARK supports Early Learning in postsecondary institutions and offers university educators special resources to support Early Childhood education. [Click Here](#) to read more about SPARKuniversity.

In addition, SPARK offers lifetime follow up support, monthly webinars and social media opportunities for continued learning and professional growth.

3. Why Should You Partner with SPARK?

- SPARK (originally funded by the National Institutes of Health in 1989) offers proven, research-based solutions for increasing the quantity and quality of daily physical activity as well as improving nutrition.
- SPARK is also the **ONLY NIH-researched program** available providing coordinated curriculum, training, follow up support, and equipment for Pre-K through 12th grade teachers. (See SPARK alignment to national and state standards -- and -- SPARK scope and sequence at www.sparkpe.org.)
- The SPARK staff of researchers and educators have 20 years of successful experience working at state, community, and district levels in both urban and rural areas; and with a variety of cultures and demographics ([Click Here](#) to read about statewide adoption in North Carolina).
- SPARK offers award-winning programs that extend beyond Early Childhood, including [K-12 PE](#), [After School](#) and [Coordinated School Health Initiative](#) (CSHI). Children who participate in SPARK EC will learn the skills they need to progress to the SPARK K-2 program for kindergarten.
- Each SPARK program provides a coordinated package of curriculum (the “what to teach”), teacher training (the “how to teach it”), content-matched equipment (the “tools you need to teach”), and extensive follow up support (because programs must institutionalize to be successful).
- SPARK was recently identified as a successful model for combating childhood obesity in the report, “*Fighting Obesity: What Works, What’s Promising*” by the HSC Foundation. The report speaks of SPARK’s history, practice, and methods. **SPARK was the ONLY program recommended for physical education AND physical activity.** [Click Here](#) for the full report.
- SPARK has been honored as an Exemplary Program of the U.S. Department of Education; cited in the Surgeon General’s Report as a “School-based solution to our nation’s healthcare crisis;” earned a “Governor’s Commendation;” and in 2005, was awarded “Gold” (highest ranking) for their elementary and middle school PE programs in an independent study commissioned by the Cooper Institute. SPARK is the ONLY program to earn “PE Gold” grades K-8.

4. Deliverables Aligned To the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Program

The following is a description of what deliverables are included in the SPARK Early Childhood Premium program that align with the RTT-ELC program.

Curriculum Components:



EC Manual

- New “Ready, Set, Go!” format on color-coded pages
- Instructional units written in scope and sequence
- Musical ASAP Activities for lesson warm-up and cool-down
- More than 300 different, field-tested activities
- Academic Integrations throughout
- Inclusion Strategies and Limited Space Adaptations
- Family Fun take-home activities that align with SPARK EC lessons



EC SPARKfolio

- Holds and organizes teaching materials provided on SPARKfamily.org
- Color-coded and laminated cards divided by tabs for easy access
- Many are English on one side and Spanish on the other
- Save time and \$ downloading, copying, and laminating



SPARK EC Music CD

- A 2 CD set containing the music you need to teach all the activities in the SPARK EC manual
- Musical ASAP Activities that engage students with lively music and rhythmic movement skills



SPARKfamily.org

SPARKfamily.org: SPARKfamily.org is a special, password-protected website where you can access a library of effective digital tools to support your early childhood physical activity program.

SPARKfamily members can:

- View video clips of SPARK activities
- Use interactive alignment and assessment tools
- Access hundreds of skill and task cards – English and Spanish

4. Deliverables Aligned To the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Program (cont.)

Staff Development:



- 2 full-day workshops (12 hours total) either consecutive days or two trips
- Project coordination, prep/planning (pre, during, post) by SPARK staff and trainers
- Needs assessments, workshop, and program evaluations, compiled & provided
- Handouts and teaching materials for up to 40 attendees prepared and shipped
- Teachers eligible for unit of credit at San Diego State University (per program)

Note: SPARK workshops are FUN and “hands on.” Teachers/instructors learn by doing and become motivated by our dynamic staff of SPARK Certified Trainers. Research data shows that attendees teach more and better activity classes after participating in a SPARK training. Workshops are conducted any place, any day of the week, any time.

Content-Matched Equipment:



SPARK also provides you with the tools you need to implement a successful program. Can you imagine looking at a 10,000 item catalog and trying to select the right 8” foamball from 16 choices? You won’t have to. SPARK content experts have created equipment sets that match each item to an activity, saving teachers and administrators valuable time. Each set consists of quality Sportime equipment and includes all the items needed to instruct everything in the SPARK manual. A select team of SPARK program developers, curriculum writers, and workshop presenters meet annually to modify the equipment sets that align perfectly with SPARK activities.

Lifetime Follow-up:



- SPARK Star Training & materials (gifts for Stars, web tools, ongoing consultation)
- Lifetime support for attendees and administrators via 800 # and e-mail
- SPARK e-newsletter sent to each attendee monthly
- Monthly Webinar Series
- Opportunities to collaborate with colleagues through social media

SPARK is unlike other programs where participants receive a book and a workshop. Programs presented in this fashion often don’t last. SPARK strives to foster environmental change and institutionalization of concepts and methods. SPARK facilitates these goals by training staff members to maintain program continuity long after the workshops have ended. These SPARK “Stars” receive specialized training at the conclusion of the workshop, supplemental materials, web-based content, everything they need to ensure their site continues to provide quality physical activity programming into the future.

For all programs, the entire SPARK team assists with physical activity questions or concerns. SPARK provides lifetime consultation and support via 800 number, e-mail, website, and informative monthly webinars and eNewsletters.

5. Evaluation and Assessment Tools

SPARK Standard and Premium programs include the following four evaluative efforts and free consultation on their use:

1. **Formative/Needs Assessment:** SPARK workshops are modified and targeted to meet the needs of each school or agency. To accomplish this goal, SPARK staff conduct a phone interview to understand the vision and direction of the participating school, district, or agency. During the interview important questions on activity quantity and quality are also posed. Additionally, SPARK disseminates a survey to each workshop attendee to analyze current offerings, ascertain program strengths/successes, and what they would like to focus on during staff development. These tools are compiled and given to the host agency, and presented to the SPARK trainer as a critical component of her/his presentation preparation.
2. **Inservice Evaluation:** SPARK Trainers have each attendee complete an inservice evaluation after a workshop. These measure the effectiveness of the training session. Evaluations are compiled and presented to the host.
3. **Program Evaluation:** SPARK Project Coordinators send a Final Debriefing Form for the district to administer near the end of the school year to all SPARK workshop attendees. This survey poses questions regarding teacher/youth leader utilization of the program (quantity and quality) and their impressions of its effects on student achievement. This data is shared with the host district/agency.
4. **Lesson Quality Assessments (LQA):** SPARK provides and instructs participating teachers in the use of their LQA, which is an evaluative tool that measures SPARK compliance and instructional effectiveness. There is a different LQA for each SPARK program. LQA's may also be used as data collection tools as part of a research project and/or as a more in-depth effort to collect data to show change in teacher effectiveness.

Contact SPARK:

We'll ask you a few questions, learn about your current early childhood programs, and listen to your vision for creating a healthier community. Together, we'll create a program that will WORK and LAST.

The SPARK Programs
1-800-SPARK-PE (772-7573)

spark@sparkpe.org

www.sparkpe.org