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# Fit Kids Schools Walk the Walk

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## Issue

Physical activity reduces the risk of coronary heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer, and diabetes mellitus. Regular physical activity in childhood improves strength and endurance, helps build healthy bones and muscles, helps control weight, reduces stress, increases self-esteem, and may improve blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Only about one in four of 12 to 21 year olds participate in light to moderate activity every day. One-third of students in grades 9 through 12 participated in daily school physical education in 2003, down from 42% in 1991. As children get older, they become less active. Inactive children are more likely to become inactive adults.

## Intervention

The Fit Kids of Lower Hudson Valley program assists schools in Westchester, Dutchess, Orange and Putnam Counties in providing increased opportunities for students to be physical active. The development of ongoing walking programs has been encouraged because walking is a relatively simple, low cost exercise that can be enjoyed by all age groups. The overall goal is to motivate children to discover an activity that they can do throughout their lives. To support walking programs, Fit Kids has provided schools with over 3,800 pedometers and a variety of incentive prizes for student participants.

## Impact

Fit Kids schools introduced ongoing walking activities:

- **Arthur S. May** (Arlington) – PTA funds paid for paving a 1/5 mile walking trail. Students must walk once around the track during daily recess and miles are logged. Almost 100% of the school's 500 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> graders participate.
- **Goshen Intermediate** (Goshen), **Richard J. Bailey Elementary** (Greenburgh), **Oak Grove Elementary** (Wappingers), **Port Jervis Middle School** (Port Jervis), **Cornwall Middle School** (Cornwall), **Hawthorne Elementary** (Mt. Pleasant), **Columbus Elementary** (Mt. Pleasant), **South Jr. High** (Newburgh), **Brookside** (Yorktown), **La Grange Elementary**, **Traver Road**

and **Vail Farm Elementary** (Arlington) formed recess or after-school walking clubs.

- **West Road D'Aquanni Intermediate** (Arlington) initiated a before-school walking program. Students logged over 5,000 miles during the 2006-7 school year. A fundraiser was held in September to raise money to pave the track.
- **Richard J. Bailey, Hawthorne Elementary, Park Avenue** (Port Chester), **Cornwall Middle School, La Grange Elementary, Traver Road** and **Vail Farm Elementary** designated walking paths for student use.
- Many schools participated in walking events. **Violet Avenue** (Hyde Park) held a 5-day walking activity. **Otisville Elementary** (Minisink Valley), **Oak Grove Elementary** (Wappingers) and **Hagan Elementary** (Spackenkill) participated in the NY Statewide Center for Healthy School's *Healthy Steps* program. **Bedford Hills Elementary** (Bedford) held a mini-marathon walking activity. **Dows Lane K-1 School** (Irvington) and **Highview** (Greenburgh) conducted *Walk Across America* events.



**Mohansic Elementary** (Yorktown) organized a kindergarten marathon for students and parents. **Midland Elementary** and **Osborn** (Rye) designated monthly year-round walk-to school days. **Milton** (Rye) has a *Run Across America* activity every Friday. **Claremont** (Ossining) participates in an annual walking event each spring. Ossining organized a community-wide walk-to-school day in May 2007 as part of the Westchester County Executive's Mayors' and Supervisors' Challenge. Several schools participated in International Walk to School Day in October 2007.

- In total, approximately 14,000 students at 27 Fit Kids of Lower Hudson Valley schools have had the opportunity to participate in walking programs.

## Importance of Impact

Schools play a critical role by providing their students with opportunities to be physically active. Those that offer physical activity programs have a positive impact on students' health. Participation in these programs can also have positive effects on academic achievement, including improved test scores and better behavior, even when time for physical education reduces the time available for academics. Positive experiences with physical activity at a young age help lay the basis for being active throughout life.

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NYS Healthy Heart Program