

# Daily Physical Activity

By Susan Tromanhauser, Principal of St. Ann School

In anticipation of the Ministry of Education announcement to mandate daily physical activity (DPA), St. Ann Catholic School in Fenwick, Ontario (in the Niagara Falls area) became part of a pilot project during the 2004-2005 school year. While there is no “right” way to implement a new initiative, our experiences at St. Ann may be a model to assist others.

We planned for our 2004 September start by first introducing the concept to teachers at our previous June staff meeting. Like any new program, DPA needed the support of all staff members. The rationale for the program was presented. Staff was provided with research that demonstrated the positive effects daily physical activity has on student achievement.

Convinced that this was a project from which all students would benefit, our staff worked together to develop a plan that would fit everyone’s timetable. There was initial hesitation. Where could we possibly find 20 minutes within the instructional day for this initiative? It was decided that we could fit 10 minutes of DPA into the day by making it a school-wide activity as part of opening exercises. The classroom teacher would then ensure that an additional 10 minutes of DPA would be done individually at a convenient time in the afternoon, which may include their regularly scheduled physical education period.

We began the program on the very first day of school. As is tradition in our school community, the first day of school began with a general assembly in the gym. This year, however, began with a special guest, Mike Sheahan, physical education consultant for the Niagara Catholic District School Board. Mike introduced the concept of

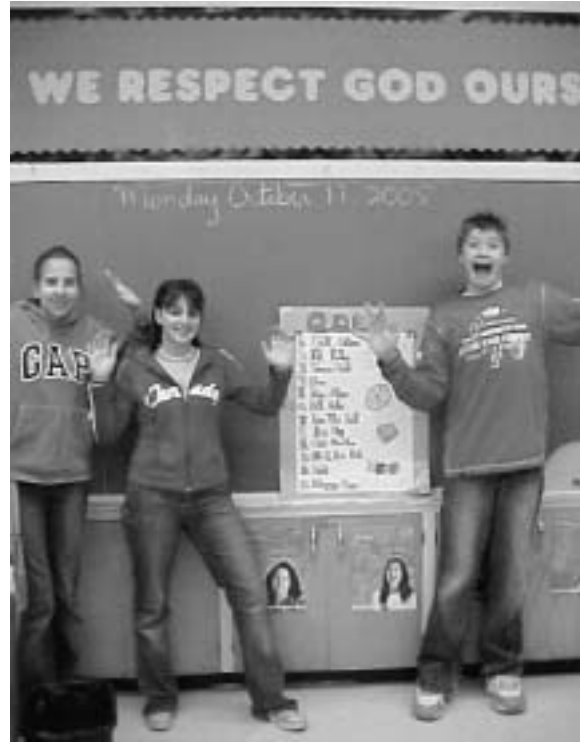


Photo courtesy of St. Ann Catholic School, Niagara CDSB.

DPA to the students and then blasted music, which got the students excited and moving. He put us through a 10-minute aerobic activity.

**Many parent volunteers working in the school joined us in DPA. Our caretaker also joined in each day!**

We discovered something important in our first lesson; ensure that you are dressed appropriately! Being the first day of school, all of the students, as well as the staff, were dressed to impress. Everyone was wearing new clothes that were not necessarily suitable for such vigorous movement, especially in the heat of an early September day.

Daily Physical Activity (DPA) became part of our regular morning announcement routine each day. Our



Grade 8 students took turns doing announcements each week. They were most excited about the job because they got to select the songs that we moved to each day. A wide assortment of music was used from the Beatles to the Black Eyed Peas. Of course, the music was pre-approved, but the senior students took ownership by selecting the songs for each day.

Initially teachers were the leaders of the daily exercise program. Senior students then developed simple routines and taught them to the younger grades. Charts were created and laminated to list “DPA moves”. The only requirement was to move enough to increase and sustain heart rates.

Communicating with the parent community about our DPA program was very important. Not only did we want parents to become aware of the link between physical activity and student achievement, we needed parents to support the program by encouraging their child’s active participation.

Prior to our September implementation, parents were informed about the program and its rationale in the year-end newsletter. Through the monthly newsletter parents were kept informed about our progress and were reminded to ensure students wear appropriate clothing.

**Our students became very active not only during DPA but the activity level also transferred to recess times. Our students moved!**

Many parent volunteers working in the school joined us in DPA. Our caretaker also joined in each day! As the principal, I felt that it was very important to be seen as a role model for staff and students by participating in DPA each day myself. Pictures of our school community participating in DPA were shown on our school website as well as on the DPA bulletin board. The local press wrote a great article in support of the program as well. Students realized very quickly that this program was an important part of our day and was supported by the community.

Our Catholic School Council was informed of DPA and supported it whole-heartedly. As one of our curriculum goals for the year our council planned an evening for parents and students to learn about the importance of physical activity as well as good nutrition. The school nurse worked with council members as well as senior students to plan a very successful “Food and Fitness Fun Night”. Student nurses taught our students about the importance of healthy lunches and snacks. They also taught our students the movements to the “Cha Cha Slide”, a song that has become our school’s theme song for DPA.

Sustaining the enthusiasm for DPA became our next priority. We had an aerobic instructor from a nearby studio come to the school and work with our students

### Successful DPA Implementation

- ♦ Communicate DPA rationale with school community
- ♦ Collegially plan and schedule
- ♦ Generate enthusiasm
- ♦ Provide a variety of activities
- ♦ Involve students in planning
- ♦ Parental Support
- ♦ Document DPA successes (newsletters, website, bulletin board, local media)
- ♦ Provide access to outside resources (e.g. OPHEA, CAHPERD, CIRA)
- ♦ Have fun!



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and teachers. To keep things fresh we introduced our students to different kinds of music including that of the big band era. DPA leaders switched classrooms. Good weather brought us outside. Bad weather created an indoor triathlon. A few times a month the whole school gathered in the gym for DPA.



We shared suggestions with teachers from other schools involved in the pilot project. As part of the activities teachers planned for the afternoon DPA, students were explicitly taught “Active Playground” games using the lines painted on the asphalt in the playground. The “Travel Across Canada” plan was created. Laps of the schoolyard were recorded to amass over 7000 kilometres across our country. A special assembly was held in June when we finally reached our goal - Victoria, British Columbia!

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**Every student at our school improved their fitness levels in at least one category.**

We also participated in the Go Active! Olympic Fitness Challenge. This is a program that measured our fitness levels in October and again in May. This program is reminiscent of the Canadian Fitness Awards of a previous generation. Every student at our school improved their fitness levels in at least one category. This program also earned our school \$1000.00 of credits towards Wintergreen Physical Education equipment. (More information can be found at [www.fitnesschallenge.ca](http://www.fitnesschallenge.ca).)

We are now in our second year of DPA. Our school community views DPA as part of our school culture. While initially the staff was skeptical that DPA would take away from valuable instructional time, now they all agree that it is time well spent. The morning routine pumps us up for the day. The students (and staff) are more awake and prepared to start their day after moving for 10 minutes. Teachers use the additional 10 minutes in the afternoon as a rejuvenator after lunch or any other time that students need a boost.

DPA is no longer a pilot project at St. Ann's; it is part of who we are as a community.

*For further information on this DPA pilot project contact principal Susan Tromanhauser at [susan.tromanhauser@ncdsb.com](mailto:susan.tromanhauser@ncdsb.com).*