

Program: **SCHOOLS**

Rockland Teachers Agree: “Healthy Students Learn Better” Physical Activity Gets Kids Brains Moving!

Rockland County, NY January 2008 - Over a span of four years, Steps to a HealthierNY (Steps), spearheaded by the Rockland County Department of Health (DOH), worked with all nine of the county’s school districts to strengthen health promotion by helping schools better coordinate their health programming and by providing professional development opportunities for staff. Steps helped school districts prepare wellness policies to improve physical activity and food choices by supporting development of district level School Health Advisory Councils which function as a “think tank” for health programming. Additionally, using the “School Health Index,” a nationally recognized assessment and planning guide, schools designed action plans for improvement that were developed by teachers, administrators, parents, students, and the community, achieving positive and encouraging results.

The Steps program, in partnership with Rockland 21st Century Collaborative for Children and Youth, worked with school administrators, nurses and teachers at 52 schools across Rockland County to help them make over 200 organizational and policy changes improving access to physical activity and nutritious food. Examples include: healthy items added to, and unhealthy items removed from the cafeteria, no longer using candy as a reward, walking or fitness challenges for students and staff, and equipment added to playgrounds and fitness rooms.

Through a unique program created by Steps and the Rockland Teachers’ Center Institute called *Learning in Motion*, teachers learn to use physical activity in their lesson plans to support healthy brain development and student achievement. There are 139 teachers trained and the results; reactions and responses are gratifying and exciting. One 5th grade teacher remarked: *“Now I think that using physical activity in my lessons is wonderful. Before, I couldn’t justify it. Now, I have permission - there’s research to back up the use of physical activity in the classroom.”* Another elementary school teacher remarked, *“I see using physical activity in my lessons as a way of reenergizing the students.”* Mary, an eager 2nd grader excitedly commented: *“My teacher uses physical activity to **get our brains moving**. It helps my brain think better.”* And, another 2nd grader, Kevin tells us; *“I like doing physical activity because it gets my brain constantly moving. **If you get brain dead you can’t do any of the work**. It helps you know things very well. I like when my teacher puts up new spelling words and makes us do movement to them!”*

Learning in Motion is for middle and high school classrooms too. A high school math teacher reflected, *“If about half of our learning brain cells are devoted to movement and novelty, how can “be seated and be quiet” be an effective teaching strategy?”* There is even enthusiasm among school administrators. Several school principals have noticed the improvements in student behavior and learning and requested that all their teachers become trained. From the students’ and parents’ point of view, what could be better than being successful in school and healthy too? Many colorful and useful school- and student-friendly materials are available.

For more information call the Rockland County DOH at 845-364-2500
or visit the STEPS website at www.rocklandsteps.org also visit:
http://www.cdc.gov/steps/success_stories/pdf/rockland.pdf