

# Walk This Way—Promoting Physical Activity in Schools with Indoor Walking Trails

Onondaga County Health Department



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The Onondaga County Health Department is partnering with the Syracuse City School District (SCSD) to provide opportunities for students to engage in physical activity before, during, and after the school day. In addition, these efforts are helping SCSD to meet the New York State Education Department's (NYSED) requirements for physical education.

*"The walking trail helps students to support an active lifestyle beyond the gymnasium and throughout the day. It can also help reduce stress when students need a break from the classroom." PE teacher, Porter School*

Schools can support the physical and emotional well-being of children by promoting physical activity through various opportunities, including recess, classroom activity breaks, physical education classes, and active transport to and from school. Throughout New York, schools serve more than 2.6 million youth and are where youth spend most of their day.

## Building a Trail to Health

During the second year of the Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC) grant, the health department planned, developed, designed, and installed an indoor ¼ mile walking trail at the Public Service Leadership Academy at Fowler High School. The trail's popularity along with the collaboration of school champions and wellness committee teams led to the development of similar trails in Bellevue, H.W. Smith, Dr. Weeks, and Porter Elementary Schools. These trails are sustainable environmental changes and with the support from the district's Superintendent are being adopted in all district school buildings, beginning with all elementary school level buildings. By fall 2018, an additional 10 buildings will have walking trails that teachers can use to get students moving. These buildings include Delaware, LeMoyne, McKinley-Brighton, Franklin, Roberts, Huntington, Meachem, Van Duyn, and The Syracuse Latin School elementary buildings, and McCarthy at Beard, a K-12 building.



Walking trail signage

Each indoor walking trail is customized to the school building, featuring school colors and a school logo. They also have messages encouraging students to eat veggies and fruit, drink milk or water, and choose whole grains. At some schools like McCarthy at Beard, students will make posters with healthy messages in art class that will be displayed along the trail.

In addition to providing an opportunity for students to move, some teachers are using the trails to demonstrate math facts and equations, an active teaching method that gets kids up and on the trails. Others are using the trails for geography-related walking challenges. For example, H.W. Smith Peaceful Schools Health & Fitness Enrichment teacher Meghan Hallihan uses the indoor walking trail for a 'Walk Across America' challenge.

Students walk the number of miles it takes to get to certain cities, tracking their progress on a map. When they ‘make it’ to those cities, they have a celebration.

Whether the indoor walking trails are used for academics or to give students a 10-minute physical activity break, they are helping SCSD reach physical activity requirements in a stimulating environment. Indoor walking trails are just one intervention that the Onondaga County Health Department’s CHSC grant led to. The grant money will continue to support SCSD on the “trail to health,” and will help other community organizations and worksites improve the health of their staff.



**to learn more...**

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## Creating Healthy Schools and Communities

*The places where we live, learn, work, and play all contribute to our ability to become and stay healthy. Creating Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC), a five-year (2015-2020) New York State Department of Health-funded initiative, is helping build stronger, healthier communities.*