



educational systems

State level data about Alaskan schools were collected from health education staff at the Department of Education and Early Development and staff from the University of Alaska through the key informant interview process. Regional level school data were retrieved from 54 of the 55 Alaskan school districts. Local school data were collected from 146 of 150 randomly selected elementary, middle, and high schools. School district and individual school data were retrieved via telephone survey. Superintendents or assistant superintendents were targeted for regional information, and school principals, physical education teachers, and/or food service directors were the contact persons for individual school data.

University of Alaska

At the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), the Health, Outdoor, and Physical Education (HOPE) Program is responsible for leadership in health, outdoor, and physical education for Alaska. Changes are currently being made within this program, and the degree most likely to be available in the future for physical education will be a Bachelor of Science in Physical Education with an emphasis in either adventure/outdoor Education or Exercise/Sport Leadership. Students completing this degree program would then be eligible to participate in a Masters of Teaching program in physical education, which would qualify those students to teach physical education.

On campus, a physical education and sports facility, the Wells Fargo Sport's complex, is available for students, faculty, staff, and the public for individual and organized recreation. The facility houses a gym, swimming pool, ice rink, fitness center, jogging track, and dance studio.

The University of Alaska-Southeast (UAS) offers a certificate in Outdoor Studies. An experienced staff of outdoor enthusiasts combine to teach a nine-month program that earns passing students a certificate in Outdoor Skills and Leadership. The Outdoor Studies program includes instruction and participation in physical activities such as ice climbing, rock climbing, sea kayaking, backpacking, skiing, snowboarding, and river rafting. UAS is currently building a new student recreation center which will provide students with courts, weights, a climbing wall, aerobics, and an outdoor recreation center.

While the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) system does not offer a degree program in physical education, it does offer a variety of physical activity related supports. It offers the LIFE wellness program to all faculty, staff, and students. This program consists of a variety of activities, events, and workshops that emphasize personal wellness. Most of the activities are held at the Student Recreation Complex, which features courts, a climbing wall, weights, running track, an aerobics room, racquetball, pool, ice arena and has lockers/showers.



Department of Education and Early Development

Alaska Administrative Code (AAC) regulations state that two of the goals for our public school system are “graduating students who will be committed to their own health and fitness” (AAC.04.020) and “providing students with a working knowledge of skills for a healthy life” (AAC.04.030).

The Department of Education and Early Development is the state agency charged with helping schools accomplish these tasks (Alaska Statute 14.07.020). It developed the requirements that call for Alaskan high school students to complete one unit of health/physical education to be eligible to receive a high school diploma (AAC 06.075). High school students who take one credit (usually equal to two semesters) of health or physical education are eligible to graduate under this statute. Due to the wording of this regulation, we can say that physical education is optional at schools that also offer health classes. The Department of Education and Early Development does not require elementary and middle school students to take physical education.

The Department of Education and Early Development has developed content standards in eleven different subject areas, including *Skills for a Healthy Life*, for school districts to use when developing their curriculum. Content standards define what Alaskans want students to know and be able to do as a result of their public education.⁵ *Skills for a Healthy Life* content standards and curriculum framework address both individual health and the individual's contribution to the health of the community, and are intentionally broad so that individual communities can design programs specific to their community health needs. They do not include any performance standards or specific recommendations for student instruction in physical education.

The Department of Education and Early Development also addresses physical activity in schools through its Child Nutrition Services, which administers USDA Team Nutrition grants that support the creation of local policies focused on healthy eating and regular physical activity. Team Nutrition grantees receive training on the new USDA program called “Eat Smart. Play Hard.” In that program a physically active “Power Panther” is a mascot, who delivers nutrition and physical activity messages to children and their caregivers.

School Districts

To learn more about school district policies, programs, and environmental supports for physical activity, staff surveyed by telephone the superintendent or assistant superintendent of 54 out of 55 Alaskan school districts, for a response rate of 98.2%.

Question #1-Does your district currently have a policy requiring physical education?

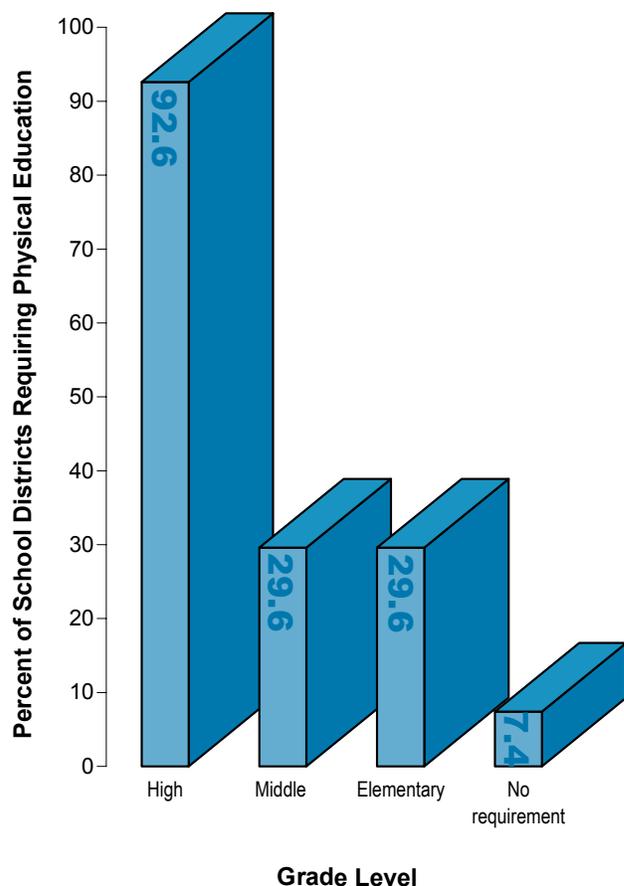
#1-A: What grades are covered by the policy?

Results: Fifty Alaskan school districts (92.6%) have a written policy requiring physical education. All of those districts require physical education for their high school students.



Sixteen of those districts have a policy requiring physical education at the elementary and middle school level. Four school districts have no written policy requiring physical education at any level.

Figure 5. Physical Education Requirement by Grade Level



1-B: What are time requirements for physical education in your district?

Results: At the elementary level, sixteen school districts require physical education thirty minutes or less per session. None of the districts surveyed require PE classes to last over 45 minutes. Twenty-two districts have no time requirements for elementary physical education classes.

In addition, twenty school districts have no requirement mandating how many days per week elementary physical education classes should be offered. Twenty-three districts don't require that children take physical education for any specific number of quarters/semesters per year and twenty-eight don't specify the number of years elementary students must take P.E. in order to be promoted to the next level of education.



At the middle school level, twenty school districts have no requirement for how many minutes physical education classes should last. However, of the districts that do have policies addressing such requirements, eleven required the recommended 45-60 minutes of class time for five days per week.

While nineteen districts have no requirement for how many days per week or how many **quarters/semesters per year** students must participate in physical education, eleven districts call for students to participate in PE five days per week, and sixteen districts require participation all year. Twenty-three districts do not regulate how many years middle school students must enroll in physical education to be promoted to high school.

At the high school level, thirty-seven school districts call for the recommended 45-60 minutes of physical education per class, thirty-three of which require participation five days per week. In different combinations of quarters and semesters, twenty school districts require high school students to take physical education for one year out of four. Twelve have a two-year requirement and four require physical education all four years of high school.

Question #2 – Does your district have a policy requiring unstructured recess for grades K-6?

Results: Thirty-nine districts have a policy requiring unstructured recess for grades K-6.

Question #3 – Does your district have a written policy prohibiting use of physical activity as punishment?

Results: Thirty-nine Alaskan school districts have a policy prohibiting the use of physical activity as punishment/discipline.

Question #4 – Does your district have a written policy requiring crossing guards at crosswalks in front of elementary and middle schools?

Results: None of the districts surveyed have a policy requiring crossing guards to be in front of elementary and middle schools when children are coming and going to school.

Question #5 – Does your district have a written policy requiring secure bike racks on school grounds?

Results: Three of the surveyed districts have a written policy requiring secure bike racks to be available to students on school grounds.



Question #6 – Does your district have a written physical education curriculum?

#6-A: Are physical education teachers required to follow this curriculum?

Results: Forty-six school districts report the presence of a written physical education curriculum. Of those districts, forty-five say that teachers are required to follow the physical education curriculum.

#6-B: Is your physical education curriculum based on the “skills for a healthy life” content standards endorsed by the Department of Education and Early Development?

Results: Forty districts report that they have based their physical education curriculum on the “skills for a healthy life” content standards endorsed by the State of Alaska Department of Education and Early Development.

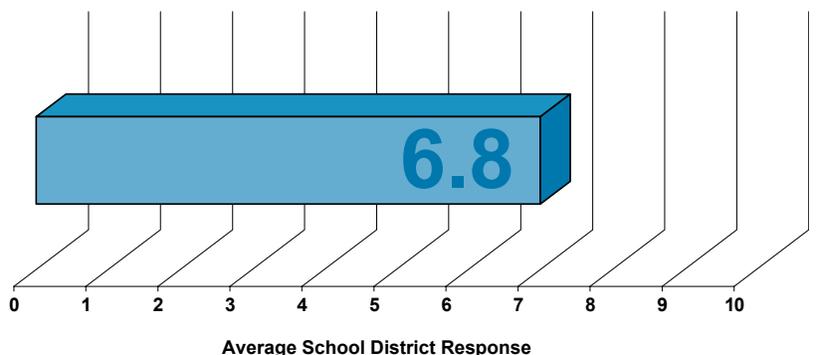
#6-C: Was your physical education curriculum developed by: 1) The district curriculum coordinator? 2) The district curriculum team? 3) The local School Board?

Results: The results from this survey show that school district physical education curriculums are developed by a variety of groups, the most common (45) being a district curriculum development team. Other districts used a district curriculum coordinator, the local school board, or a combination of the three.

Question #7 – Given your districts various priorities, how interested are you in discussing ways to improve student physical activity levels in you district? Please rate your interest level on a scale of 1 to 10.

Results: When asked to rate the level of interest in discussing ways to improve the physical activity level of their students given their districts various priorities, 45 district administrators indicated an interest level of 5 out of 10 or higher, with eighteen districts indicating an interest level of 8 out of 10.

Figure 6.





Schools

Even though schools operate under the policies of their district, individual schools are sometimes left to make decisions about their own policies and programs. For this inventory, an elementary, middle, and high school from each school district were randomly selected to participate in a telephone survey, resulting in an even distribution of rural and urban schools of all sizes. The following survey was conducted via telephone with school administrators, physical education instructors, or food service directors from 146 out of the 150 selected schools (97% response rate).

Note: Many rural schools have one school building that houses students in grades K-12. Even though they share the same building, there are often different policies and programs for each grade level. For this reason, schools housing students in grades K-12 were considered three separate schools for data reporting, bringing the total number of schools surveyed to 271. Also, schools combining grades K-12 tend to have different policies from standard schools. Because of this, some results in this section will highlight the differences between K-12 and standard schools.

Question #1-Does your school offer physical education?

Results: All but five of the surveyed schools offer physical education.

Question #2- Are students in your school required to take physical education?

Results: There were eighteen schools that didn't require students to take physical education.

Question #3- Is it possible for students to get a waiver from P.E. for participation in other physical activities?

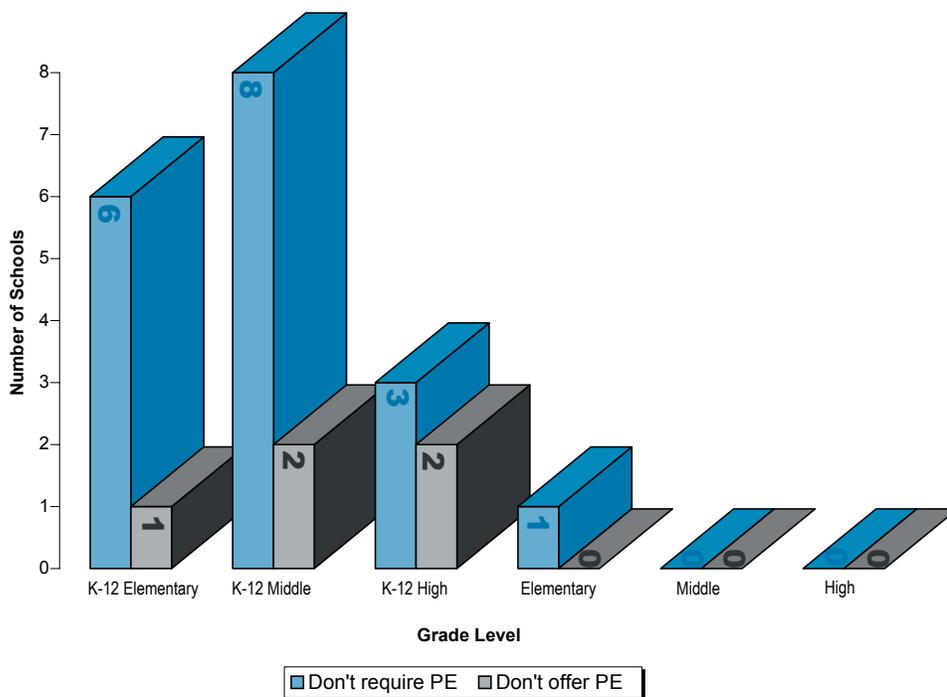
Results: The survey found that eighty-six of the 271 schools allow students to be excused from participation in physical education classes due to participation in other physical activities.

Question #4- What are time requirements for physical education in your school?

Results: In Alaskan elementary schools, time requirements for physical education are varied. Most elementary schools require students to participate in PE thirty minutes or less. K-12 schools are more likely to require five days of PE each week for the complete school year. Standard elementary schools are more likely to require two days of PE each week for the whole school year.



Figure 7. Availability of School Physical Education



The most common requirements for middle school students are for class sessions of 31 to 45 or 46 to 60 minutes, five days per week, for the whole school year. Fourteen of the ninety-two surveyed middle schools require students to participate in physical education all three years of middle school.

Fifty-six out of the seventy-two (77.0%) responding high schools require physical education classes to last more than forty-five minutes. Nearly sixty-six percent (65.7%) require those classes five days per week. A one-year (two-semesters or four quarters) requirement was reported by fifty-one of the seventy-four (68.9%) responding high schools.

Physical Education Teachers

Question #5 – Do you require that physical education classes be taught by certified PE teachers?

Results: Nearly three quarters (71.0%) of schools participating in this survey do not require that a certified PE teacher teach their physical education classes.



Question #6: Who teaches physical education at your school?

Results: Just over seventy-six percent (76.6%) of schools reported that someone other than a certified physical education teacher gives instruction in PE

Question #7: How many approved PE credit hours are required to teach PE?

Results: Over ninety-six percent (96.6%) of schools report that they don't require their physical education teacher to have any approved PE credit hours.

Curriculum, Assessment and Grades

Question #8 – Do students at your school receive a grade for physical education?

Results: More than seventy-seven percent (77.5%) of surveyed schools give grades for physical education class.

Question #9: Are PE grades calculated into student grade point averages?

NOTE: This question was not given to elementary schools.

Results: One hundred thirty-two out of the one hundred forty-six (90.4%) schools responding to this question indicate that they do calculate PE grades into the student grade point average.

Question #10 – Does your school have a written curriculum for physical education?

Results: About seventy-six percent (76.2%) of Alaskan schools surveyed have a written curriculum for physical education.

#10-A: Is your physical education curriculum based on recommendations made by a national physical education group such as the National Association of Sports and Physical Education (NASPE)?



Results: Nearly eighty-six percent (85.9%) of schools that have a written physical education curriculum say that it is based on NASPE standards.

#10-B: Are teachers required to follow the curriculum?

Results: Ninety-one percent (90.9%) of schools with a physical education curriculum indicate that teachers are required to follow the curriculum.

#10-C: Are teachers monitored to assure they are following the curriculum?

Results: Just over eighty-eight percent (88.5%) of schools monitor their teachers to assure compliance.

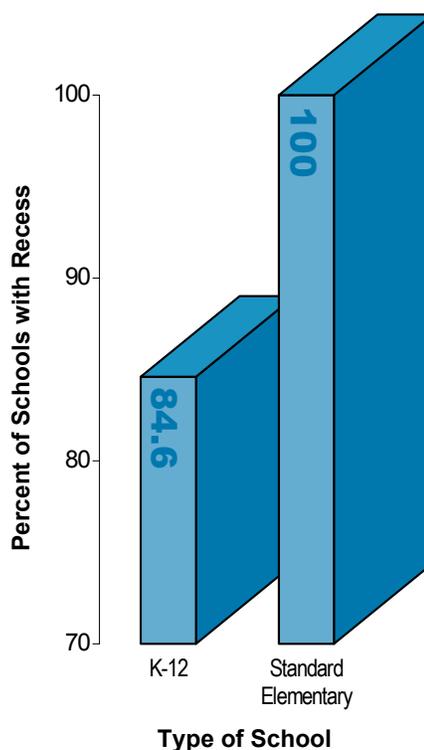
Physical Activity Related Policies

Question #11 – Does your school provide daily, unstructured recess for children in grades K-6?

NOTE: This question was only given to elementary schools.

Results: Just over eighty-four percent (84.6%) of K-12 schools participating in this survey with children in grades K-6 offer daily, unstructured recess. All of the standard elementary schools surveyed provided recess for K-6 students.

Figure 8. Occurrence of Unstructured Recess in Schools





Question #12 – Does your school have a written policy prohibiting the use of physical activity as punishment/discipline?

Results: Just over fourteen percent (14.5%) of K-12 schools surveyed have a policy prohibiting the use of physical activity as punishment/discipline, while over one quarter (25.3%) of standard schools have said policies.

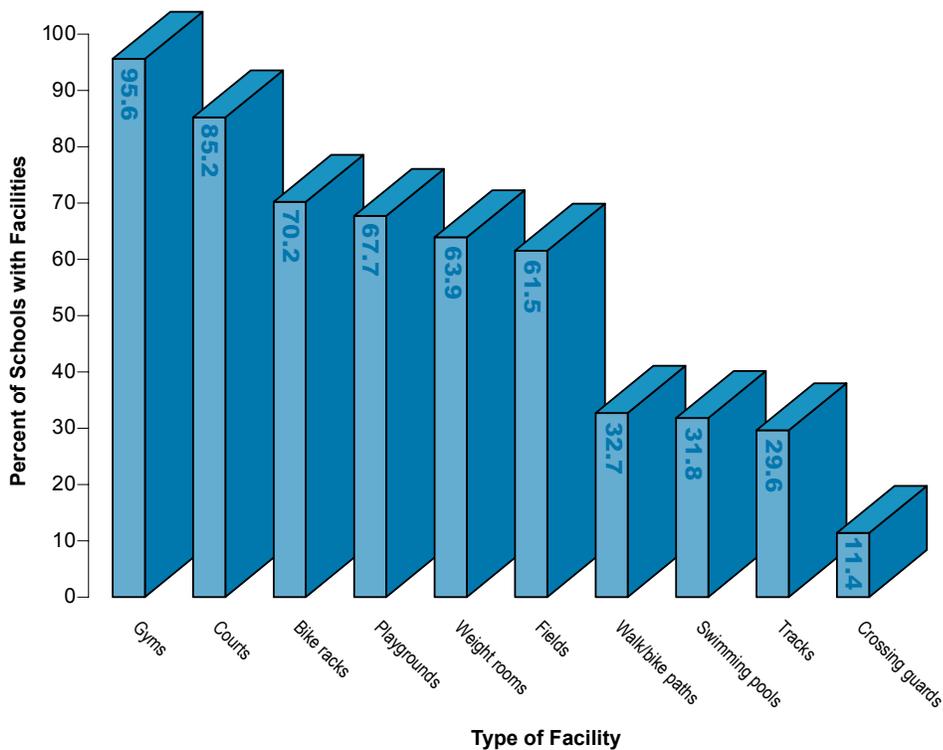
School Facilities

Question #13 – Which of the following on-campus environmental supports are available to your students?

Results: Gyms (95.6%), courts (85.2%), bike racks (70.2%), playgrounds (67.7%), weight rooms (63.9%), and fields (61.5%) appear in more than half of schools participating in this survey.

Walk/bicycle paths (32.7%), swimming pools (31.8%), tracks (29.6%), and crossing guards (11.4 %) are found in less than half of Alaskan schools surveyed.

Figure 9. Facilities offered on School Campus





Question #14 – Does your PE department have enough equipment to allow for maximum participation by students in a variety of activities?

Results: Nearly eighty-three percent (82.5%) of schools say they have enough equipment to allow a maximum number of students to participate in activities.

Question #15 – Does your PE department have a stable yearly budget for equipment?

Results: More than sixty-five percent (65.9%) of surveyed schools say that they have a stable yearly budget that helps replenish that equipment.

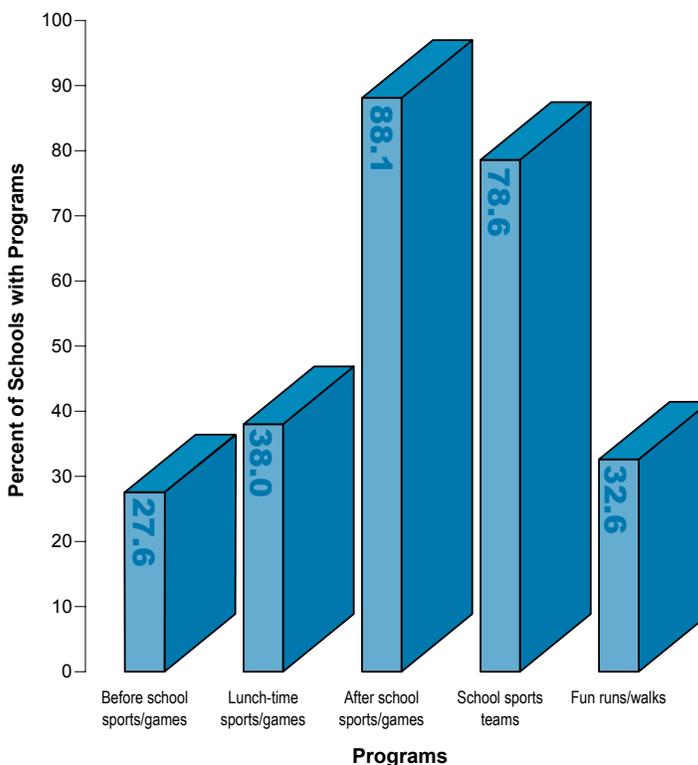
School Activities

Question #16 – Does your school offer any of the following physically active programs:

Before school sports/games? Lunch time sports/games? After school sports/games? Sports teams/clubs? Fun runs/walks?

Results: More than twenty-seven percent (27.6%) of schools participating in this survey offer physically activities before school. During lunch 38% of schools offer some kind of sports or games. After school, 88.1% of schools surveyed offer sports/ games, and 78.6% offer sport teams/clubs. About one-third (32.6%) of schools sponsor fun runs/walks for their students.

Figure 10. Activity Programs in Alaskan Schools





School Nutrition

Question #17 – Does your school have a written nutrition education curriculum?

Results: Over seventy-two percent (72.2%) of surveyed schools say they have a written nutrition curriculum.

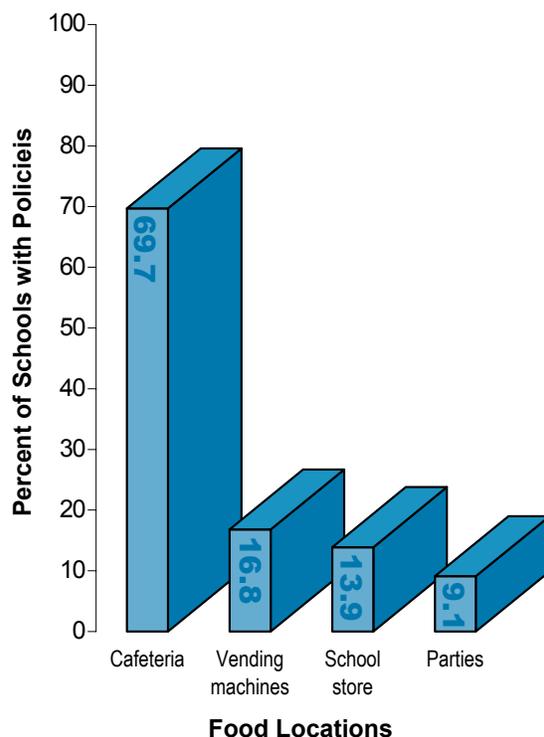
Question #18 – Does your school have a written policy prohibiting the use/denial of food as discipline/punishment?

Results: About nine percent (8.6%) of surveyed schools have a policy that prohibits the use of food as punishment/discipline.

Question #19 – Does your school have a policy that guides the nutritional value of foods offered in school vending machines, stores, cafeterias, and parties?

Results: Almost seventeen percent (16.8%) of schools with vending machines have a policy that regulates the content of those machines. During lunch hour, 69.7% of schools have a policy regulating the content of food in their school cafeteria lunches, most citing use of federal lunch programs. Only 13.9% of schools have a policy that guides what foods are offered at school stores, and 9.1% of schools have a policy that regulates the content of food at school parties.

Figure 11. Policies Governing Food Sales





Question #20 – Does your school have a nutrition advisory group that helps guide school nutrition policy?

Results: Around twenty-eight (28.8%) of schools in this survey have a nutrition advisory group that helps guide school nutrition policy.

Question #21 – Where Does profits from food sales on school premises go to? 1) school district, 2) school general fund, 3) student activities fund, 4) student group selling food, 5) other?

Results: The most popular uses of funds raised from food sales in school are the student activities fund (36.5%) and letting the student group selling the food keep the profits (39.9%).

Question #22 - If your school has a pouring right contract with a food/beverage distributor, does school administration have any influence over the content of drinks/food sold?

Results: About twenty-eight percent (28.1%) of schools in this survey report having entered into a pouring rights contract with a beverage distributor. Over seventy-seven percent (77.1%) of those schools state that they have at least some influence on the content of the food/drinks provided by that company.

Question #23 – Are lunch breaks at your school 30 minutes or longer?

Results: About ninety-six percent (96.2%) of schools participating in this survey indicate that lunch breaks are 30 minutes or longer.

Question #24 – Do the lunch breaks have structured eating and activity times?

Results: About eighty-one percent (81.3%) of surveyed schools have lunches with structured eating and activity times.

Question #25 – Are there lunch room seats for all students assigned to that lunch break?

Results: Just over eighty-one percent (81.7%) of surveyed schools report having enough seats for every student assigned to that lunch break.



Question #26 – Do students purchasing lunch wait 10 minutes or less?

Results: About seventy-four percent (74.4%) of surveyed schools have a 10 minute or less waiting time for students purchasing lunch.

Question #27 – Are students able to purchase fruits/vegetables daily?

Results: Over fifty-six percent (56.2%) of schools in this survey offer fruits/vegetables daily.

Question #28 – Is soda prohibited during the lunch hour?

Results: About twenty-seven percent (27.7%) of surveyed schools prohibit soda during lunch time.

Question #29 – Are milk, 100% fruit juice, or water available for purchase daily?

Results: Over eighty-one percent (81.9%) of surveyed schools have water, milk, or 100% fruit juice available for purchase daily.

Question #30 – Given your schools various priorities, how interested are you in discussing ways to improve student physical activity & nutrition levels in your school?

Results: Interest levels (on a scale of 1 to 10) of schools in discussing ways to improve student physical activity and nutrition practices range greatly, with 10 being the most common response.



Figure 12.

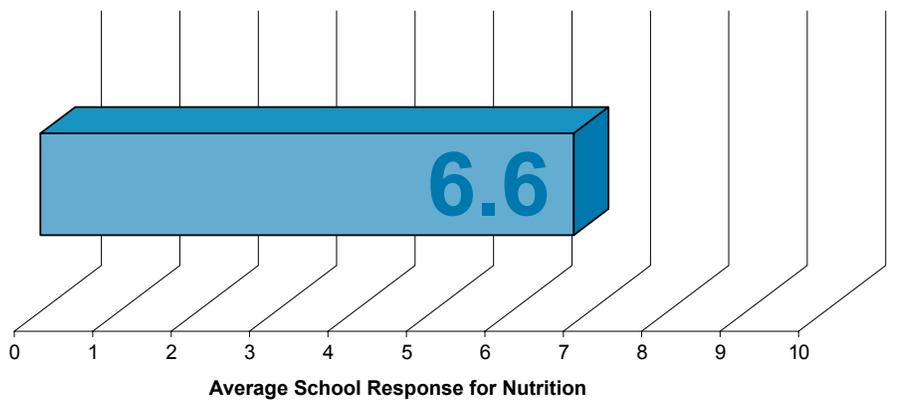
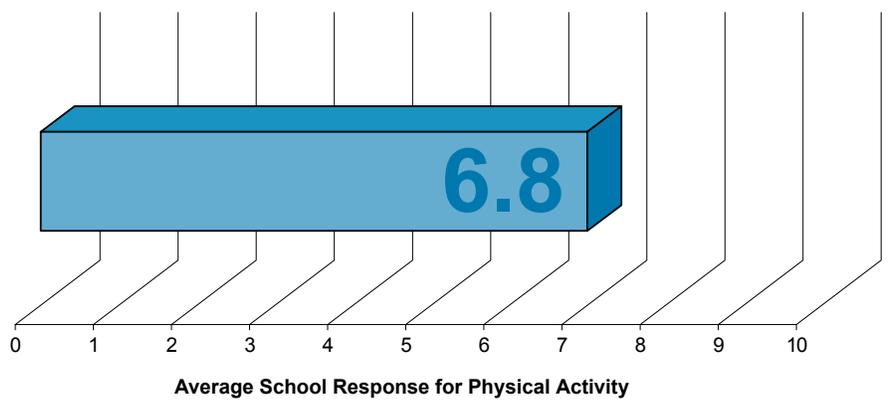


Figure 13.





Recommendations for school districts and schools

Results from the survey administered to Alaskan school districts and schools reveal some room for improvement in the policies, programs, and environmental supports they offer to Alaskan students. The following recommendations, accompanied by the survey question prompting the recommendation, are suggested by CDC for schools looking to promote cardiovascular health by taking advantage of the opportunities children have during the school day to be physically active and eat nutritious foods:

- ▶ Increase the number of policies that include daily physical education in school curricula for all students (school district survey question #1-A,B and school survey question #4);
- ▶ Increase the number of policies that require at least 20 minutes of scheduled and unstructured daily physical activity (recess) for all elementary school students (school district question #2 and school question #14);
- ▶ Increase the number of policies that require all physical education and physical activity courses, for all grades, to be overseen by certified P.E. teachers employed by the school (school district question #5-8);
- ▶ Increase the number of policies that support walking and biking to school (school district question #4, 5 and school question #16);
- ▶ Increase the percent of schools with facilities that offer a variety of competitive and non-competitive physical activity programs accessible to the majority of students (school question #19);
- ▶ Increase the number of policies that provide heart-healthy food choices outside of the food meal services (i.e., concession stands, vending machines, fund raisers, and a la carte lines) (school question #22, #30, #31 and #32).