

# Special Report

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# 'GET KIDS MOVING HOWEVER WE CAN'



KATE LONG | Sunday Gazette-Mail photos

As part of the state push to increase physical activity, Webster County high school seniors taught active games to kindergartners at Diana Elementary. Senior Levi Stout (left), who wants to be a pediatrician, said, "I understand a lot more now about why its important for kids to be active."

## FIVE DAYS A WEEK?

### Daily physical activity is affordable

By Kate Long  
Staff writer

In 2007, legislators asked the state Department of Education how much it would cost for every student to have physical education five days a week. "It seemed like the obvious step to take," said Sen. Erik Wells, D-Kanawha.

One in four fifth-graders has high blood pressure and cholesterol. One in four eleven-year-olds is obese, a clear red flag for the future.

They sent the department a resolution that began with "Whereas, seven of 10 West Virginians will die of heart disease, cancer or stroke; and whereas, 28 percent of West Virginia fifth-graders

... have one or more cardiovascular risk factors ..."

"We knew that, if we could get our kids active, we could prevent a lot of type 2 diabetes, obesity and heart disease," said Sen. Dan Foster, D-Kanawha.

But to their dismay, state Department

SEE ACTIVITY, 4E



"I can hire somebody to run good physical activity sessions for half of what I pay a good P.E. teacher."

DON CHAPMAN  
Assistant director, state  
Office of Healthy Schools



"If they had asked for the cost of daily physical activity, instead of physical education, the numbers would have been much lower."

MELANIE PURKEY  
Director, state Office of Healthy Schools



"We need to get kids more active, and qualified physical education teachers should be the ones to do it."

DALE LEE  
President, West Virginia  
Education Association

## Marple: Add exercise to lesson plans

By Kate Long  
Staff writer

DIANA — Four Webster County High School seniors danced on the kindergarten rug.

"Fly like an eagle!" they called, flapping their arms. Kindergartners flapped their wings.

"Jump like you're popcorn popping! Run from a growling bear! Slither like worms! Sway like a tree in a windstorm!" The Diana Elementary kindergartners jumped, learning vocabulary as they slithered and swayed.

The older students slithered and swayed too. They'd come to promote a new campaign to get kids up and moving through the school day.

To battle obesity, West Virginia Schools Superintendent Jore Marple is asking schools and teachers to weave 15 extra minutes of physical activity into each day. "Plenty of research tells us physical activity improves a child's ability to listen and focus and learn."

Since September, Marple's staff has crisscrossed the state, putting on more than 125 "Let's Move! West Virginia" demonstrations. They haven't reached all schools yet. "It sounds good, but I never heard of it," a Kanawha County teacher said last week.

In Webster County, one of Marple's staff members trained the high school students to demonstrate for younger kids. "I plan to be a pediatrician, so this has been a great experience," said senior Levi Stout. "It helped me understand why it's important for kids to be active."

"It's taught me how important exercise is, how it helps kids pay attention, stay healthy, and avoid things like diabetes," said Ashley Short, who plans to be a nurse.

At Diana Elementary, they played a quick, aerobic round of rock, scissors, paper with the fifth-graders, then the kids sat back down smiling, faces flushed.

"Our kids come from the hollers around Diana," said Rondlynn Cool, Diana Elementary principal. "A lot don't get much exercise outside of school. We're in favor of this."

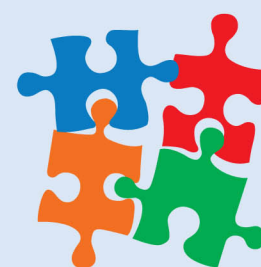
A few miles away, the lunchtime crew at the Hometown Diner was in favor, too. "These kids ought to be out climbing trees and playing," owner Sharon Hall said, "but they're stuck to those little game machines. Their thumbs get plenty of exercise, but not the rest of them."



"We know from research, that when children sit for too long, they lose the ability to concentrate."

JOREA MARPLE  
State schools superintendent

INSIDE: Marple on nutrition 3E



### THE SHAPE WE'RE IN

During the next few months, we will introduce you to people and communities that are finding ways to get a grip on West Virginia's awful chronic disease numbers.

We hope to inspire others to try. Today, we look at schools that are making a difference.

#### RELATED STORIES:

##### IN MONDAY'S GAZETTE:

■ Rocking the gym at 7:30 a.m.: Keeping kids fit

##### IN TUESDAY'S GAZETTE:

■ Nebraska school district reduces obesity rate — But how?

#### What can 15 minutes do?

Above all, Superintendent Marple wants to limit chair time — children sitting for hours.

"We have an obesity and wellness problem, and the schools can do their part by getting kids moving," she said. "We know, from re-

SEE MOVING, 4E



## MOVING

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search, that when children sit for too long, they lose the ability to concentrate.”

They are also more likely to gain weight and have high blood pressure or cholesterol. “We’d like to see younger kids up and moving every 20 minutes,” Marple said.

Soon after she took office, Marple cancelled rigid requirements that dictated the exact number of minutes teachers must spend on each subject. “If students are excited, I don’t want them to have to cut a lesson off because the time’s up,” she said.

She also wants teachers to be free to weave bursts of physical activity through the day. “We’re giving teachers the flexibility to say, ‘I know that I need to get my kids up and moving. They’ll come back more ready to concentrate.’”

“Kids are happier when they get to move,” she said. It can positively change a school’s culture, she said.

Marple hopes eventually to lower the obesity rate. In 2010-11, 18 percent of kindergartners and 23 percent of second-graders came to school obese. One in four fifth-graders had high blood pressure and red-flag cholesterol levels, and one in four was obese, according to measurements by West Virginia University.

Obese children are at higher risk of future heart disease, diabetes, stroke and other problems.

“We also have a huge percent of children who live in poverty,” Marple said. “Children who live in poverty often suffer from chronic stress. When you suffer from chronic stress, you may have difficulty focusing on instruction, and you’re more likely to be obese. Research tells us you can lower stress by getting the heart rate up. All these things are interconnected.”

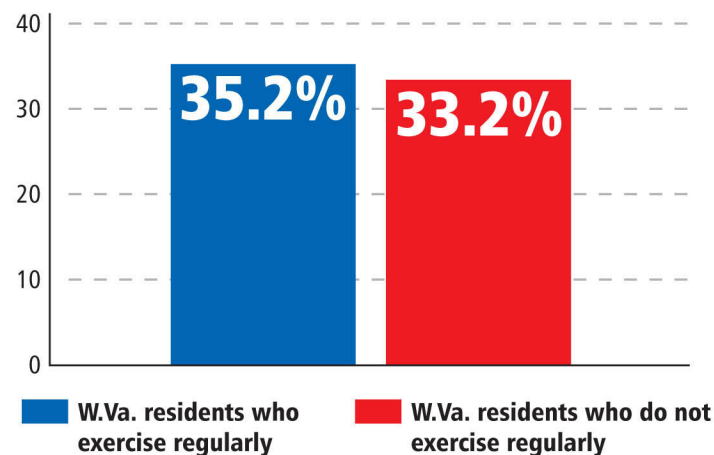
### How do we do this?

By the end of January, about 109 elementary and middle schools had signed on to Marple’s “Let’s Move! West Virginia” campaign.

There are already at least 130

## ACTIVE WEST VIRGINIANS OUTNUMBER COUCH POTATOES (SLIGHTLY)

One in three West Virginians gets at least a half hour of moderate exercise five days a week. Research shows that at that level, they can lower their risk of diabetes by 58 percent. Research also shows that more intense exercise and healthy diet can reduce cancer risk by 36 percent, diabetes risk by 93 percent and heart attack by 81 percent.



SOURCE: W.Va. Behavioral Risk Surveillance System KYLE SLAGLE | Sunday Gazette-Mail graphic

West Virginia schools in the national Healthy Schools Network, aimed at increasing physical activity and good nutrition in schools.

Mary Weikle is in charge of the “Let’s Move! West Virginia” campaign. Fifteen minutes is not enough, but it’s important to start with something that’s easily possible for a classroom teacher, she says.

She knows some teachers will resist. “With No Child Left Behind, teachers are under a lot of pressure for their kids to score well. They feel like there’s no time to lose. We hope to convince them short physical activity breaks will help, by keeping kids alert and reducing discipline problems.”

Nobody is ordering teachers to participate, Weikle said. “They’d dig their heels in harder,” she said. “We want them to buy in. We want this to become as normal as taking roll, part of what a good teacher does.”

A former P.E. teacher, Weikle is full of ideas about ways to weave movement into academic instruction. How about jumping jacks while kids recite multiplication tables? A dancing spelling bee, stopping for 15 seconds to scribble after a

spelling word is called?

Kids can spell words with their bodies while others guess the words. They can jump when they hear a correct history statement and squat when they hear a false one.

She is collecting videos of kids moving in class, with teacher testimonials, to show at schools that haven’t tried it yet. “Once teachers hear from other teachers that it works, a bunch more will want to try.”

“They’re going in the right direction, but it’s not enough and it should be mandatory,” said Sam Zizzi, West Virginia University professor of physical activity and sports sciences. “I’m guessing the 15 minutes will be squeezed in and won’t be consistent. There’ll be no quality control.

“If we really want to take a stand for fitness, we have to follow the national recommendation and get all kids physically active an hour a day. We need to make it a real part of the school day and teach kids that physical activity is important to a healthy life.

“But still, they’re starting, and that’s great,” he said. “The superintendent is putting that expectation from the top out there.

## Couch potatoes cost millions extra

Couch potatoes cost West Virginians millions every year, West Virginia University School of Medicine professor George Kelley concluded in 2009.

He examined medical costs, workers compensation payouts and lost productivity figures, then compared them with federal Centers for Disease Control figures of inactive West Virginians.

Kelley calculated that, for each 1 percent of West Virginia adults who do not exercise, compared to those who do, there is an extra \$4 million in medical bills, plus another \$17 million lost in worker productivity.

Part of the medical bills are paid by insurance companies, part by the state, some by individuals.

In West Virginia, 1 percent of adults is about 14,100 people. The CDC defines an active person as one who exercises moderately

(walking, etc.) for 30 minutes at least three times a week.

“I’m surprised by the size of his figures, but not by the idea that physical activity prevents disease and therefore saves money,” said House of Delegates Health and Human Resources Chairman Don Perdue.

“Think what we could save if 5 percent started exercising.

“It’s another excellent reason to get our children active,” he said. “We should be driven to do that, simply to protect them, but unfortunately what will ultimately drive us to do it is the cost. When we start talking about how much it costs, all the partisan objections seem to fall away.”

In 2005, 61 percent of West Virginia adults were not physically active by CDC definition. By 2009, that number was 64 percent.

The West Virginia Medical Journal published Kelley’s article “Costs of Physical Inactivity in West Virginia” in the May-June 2009 issue.

That’s a powerful thing.”

It’s a national movement, Weikle said.

■ Chicago’s Naperville Central High School brought their math scores up 20 percent after they identified students who were struggling with math and gave them intensive physical exercise the first period: aerobics, square dancing, etc.

■ Winston-Salem’s Marvin Ward Elementary School created a Ride and Read room with 30 exercise bikes so classes can exercise while they read.

■ In Kearney, Neb., parent volunteers organize and oversee intramural games or dancing at lunchtime, sometimes running and walking at mid-day.

In January, Weikle awarded the first \$500 Let’s Move! grants to 48 schools. Diana Elementary got one. “We don’t have a P.E. teacher, so our teachers teach their own. We’ll buy classroom materials,” Principal Cool said.

“I keep hearing about schools doing creative things,” Weikle said: zumba at lunchtime, line dancing before school, outside and inside walking tracks.

■ More than 100 schools have signed up for Adventures to Fitness, an energetic, free video series that teaches history while

kids work out beside their desks.

■ When Woodsmen International offered free jump ropes recently, state teachers ordered more than 75,000.

### Why not daily PE?

In 2005, the Department of Education gave the Legislature a shockingly high estimate of the money it would cost West Virginia to have daily physical education. Physical education requires certified teachers and code-specified facilities, they said. But “physical activity” can happen anytime, anywhere, supervised by any school-approved person.

The Department now says the cost can drop dramatically, if some days are physical activity. “That can be led by volunteers, teachers, or hired aides,” Purkey said. “We’d need to train them.”

Kids should be moving at least an hour a day, according to: the American Heart Association, Stroke Association, Cancer Society, Institute of Medicine, Centers for Disease Control, and the American Diabetes Association.

For physical education classes, those organizations recommend 30 minutes a day for elementary kids and 225 minutes

## Physical activity resources for teachers, parents and anyone who works with kids

■ Jammin’ Minute: free weekly emailed physical activity ideas

■ Let’s Move!: the national site, full of ideas

■ Adventures to Fitness: physical activity videos, free to any teacher

■ Activity ideas from Let’s Move West Virginia! on the state Board of Education site

■ Harvard School of Public Health, “staying active”: ideas for the whole family

■ Healthiergeneration.org: searchable database of model school physical activity programs

■ Playworks.org. Ideas for structured, active recess.

Find a more extensive list at [sundaygazette.com/theshapewerein](http://sundaygazette.com/theshapewerein)

a week for middle and high school students.

West Virginia doesn’t come close. Elementary students are required to have 30 minutes, three times a week. Middle school kids must have 30 minutes a day for one semester, but many schools collapse it into an hour a day for 18 weeks, then no P.E. for the rest of the year.

High school students are required to take only one semester during all four years.

“We don’t want to replace physical education. We just want to add more physical activity,” Weikle said. “We’ve got to get kids moving however we can.”

At the same time, a coalition of West Virginians from various sectors, ranging from business to child care are putting together a West Virginia physical activity plan that covers both adults and children. No state agency has adopted it yet, since it is not yet complete, but the efforts show that “a wide range of West Virginians recognize the need for it,” Weikle said.

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