

2024

# Active Schools

## An emerging framework for India

Issue Brief #5



# Building the case for active schools

**Many Indian children and adolescents lack sufficient engagement in sports and physical activity (SAPA), which has both immediate and long-term consequences. Schools offer a prime opportunity to instill physical activity and literacy through mandatory programs, sports, and after-school activities. Research shows childhood habits often persist into adulthood, making it crucial to promote SAPA early. This document promotes active schools in India with a physical literacy approach and offers a framework for integrating, monitoring, and assessing school-based physical activity.**

*Table 1: Grades of the 2022 India report card on physical activity for children and adolescents (selected)*

Indicator	Grade
Overall Physical Activity	C
Active Transportation	B-
Sedentary Behaviour	D-
Schools (infrastructure, policies, programs)	C

Most evidence indicates that a sizeable share of Indian children and adolescents of school-going age are not sufficiently physically active. According to a recent survey (in 2023) conducted by PUMA India and Nielsen Sports, Indian children spend a mere 86 minutes per week on sports and fitness-related activities.<sup>1</sup> This is a worrying statistic if one considers the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendation that children and adolescents get an average of at least 60 minutes per day of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity. The 2022 India Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Adolescents reveals that only about 50% of children and adolescents achieve the recommended 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA), with a notable gender disparity as boys are more likely to meet these MVPA guidelines than

girls. Furthermore, the report highlights a significant sedentary trend, indicating that merely 25% of young individuals adhere to the advised screen time limit of two hours per day.<sup>2</sup>

Typically, school children in India stop participating in organized sports or engaging in physical activity by the time they enter middle school or adolescent years, with higher attrition for pre-teen and adolescent girls. This is a result of several factors such as academic pressure, limited opportunities in sports and physical activity (SAPA), societal pressures, lack of role models, inadequate support systems, a lack of fun and positive engagement, etc. A significant proportion of children and adolescents who do not meet recommended physical activity guidelines are at an increased risk of negative outcomes as well as developing related chronic diseases at

<sup>1</sup> Raghav Aggarwal, Indian kids now spend less time than adults on physical activities: Survey, Business Standard (Mar. 27, 2023), [https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/indian-kids-now-spend-less-time-than-adults-on-physical-activities-survey-123032700257\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/indian-kids-now-spend-less-time-than-adults-on-physical-activities-survey-123032700257_1.html).

<sup>2</sup> Bhawra J, Khadiilkar A, Krishnaveni GV, Kumaran K, Katapally TR. The 2022 India Report Card on physical activity for children and adolescents. *J Exerc Sci Fit.* 2023 Jan;21(1):74-82. doi: 10.1016/j.jesf.2022.10.013. Epub 2022 Oct 31. PMID: 36408207; PMCID: PMC9663889.

a much earlier age. COVID-19 accelerated these trends, with students becoming increasingly sedentary as they had to stay indoors, take classes online, and had restricted movement.

Regular engagement in SAPA plays a pivotal role in improving the overall health and development of children and young adults, including academic performance, and generates substantial long-term, mutually reinforcing benefits. Engaging in consistent exercise and active play not only benefits their physical well-being but also contributes to their cognitive, emotional, and social development. SAPA can help children and adolescents improve cardiorespiratory fitness, build strong bones and muscles, control weight, reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, and reduce the risk of developing various health conditions.<sup>3</sup> A study found that children who participated in a physical fitness program showed significant improvement in their IQ scores compared to those who did not participate<sup>4</sup>. Another study published in the *International Journal of Sport Psychology* found that children who engaged in regular physical activity had higher scores on the test of cognitive flexibility, which is an important component of IQ.<sup>5</sup> Engaging in SAPA also provides opportunities for children and young adults to develop social skills, teamwork, and cooperation.

Schools offer a unique window and opportunity to develop lifelong SAPA habits. Scientific evidence highlights the critical nature of embedding health-promoting behaviors early on, particularly during

primary school years, a period pivotal for the neurological development of a child's preferences and motivations towards SAPA. These early habits significantly influence lifelong activity levels, with inactive children likely continuing their inactivity into adulthood, while active children tend to maintain healthier lifestyles. As they progress through these formative years, the link between SAPA and academic achievement profoundly affects their overall well-being, productivity, financial prospects, and even the health behaviors of their future offspring. Schools in India, where many children attend at least until primary level, emerge as critical platforms for fostering physical literacy. These institutions not only provide essential SAPA resources like playgrounds and sports facilities but also offer coaching and the motivational influence of peers, which play a key role in encouraging active lifestyles. This makes the primary school setting an ideal ground for establishing a solid foundation for lifelong health and activity.

Schools also stand to benefit from increased SAPA participation of their students. A school-wide commitment to promoting SAPA enhances both student behavior and academic performance, benefiting the institution. Physically active students are generally more cooperative and easier to manage, which improves school discipline and creates a better learning environment. Regular physical activity boosts cognitive function, leading to better concentration, information retention, and ultimately, improved academic outcomes. Active schools also report higher attendance, completion rates, and performance metrics,

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<sup>3</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Physical Activity Facts." Accessed October 24, 2023.

URL: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/facts.htm>

<sup>4</sup>Fedewa AL, Ahn S. The effects of physical activity and physical fitness on children's achievement and cognitive outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*. 2011;82(3):521–535.

<sup>5</sup>Arpna Gupta, Why Physical Education is Critical to Youth Development, *SCOO News* (April 5, 2023), <https://scooneews.com/news/why-physical-education-is-critical-to-youth-development/>

evidenced by better test scores and graduation rates.<sup>6</sup>

Promoting physical literacy in schools offers broad benefits at a societal and governmental level, enhancing public health and reducing healthcare costs. This active culture boosts productivity, as healthier individuals are more engaged in their work, fueling economic

growth. Moreover, SAPA encourages social cohesion, fostering teamwork and strong interpersonal relationships, which contribute to societal harmony. It also reduces the prevalence of non-communicable diseases, leading to a healthier population. Overall, SAPA promotes sustainable socio-economic development and well-being at the macro level.

Figure 1: Impact of increasing physical activity in schools



Student



School



Government

Short term

- **Improved concentration:** Post-activity boosts in attention and cognitive function
- **Mental health:** Immediate stress relief and anxiety reduction, promoting emotional well-being
- **Social skills, cooperation:** Better interaction, teamwork abilities
- **Positive behavior:** Active students exhibit more positive behavior, reduced disruptions
- **Engagement and culture:** Fosters an enthusiastic and cooperative school culture
- **Reduced healthcare costs:** Decrease in childhood obesity and related health issues can lessen public health expenses
- **Educational outcomes:** Better school performance enhances the reputation of educational policy

Long term

- **Physical health:** Lower risk of chronic health issues, driving higher school attendance
- **Mental health:** Long-term resilience against stress, depression, and anxiety; fostering a healthier school life balance
- **Cognitive and academic performance:** Enhanced memory, executive functions, and consistent higher academic achievement
- **Lifelong physical literacy:** Encourages a lasting active lifestyle, reducing future health care burdens
- **Academic excellence:** A correlation between physical education programs and school-wide performance indicators (e.g., on standardized tests, graduation rates)
- **Attendance and health:** Higher attendance and lower absenteeism (fewer sick days)
- **Reputation and funding:** Enhanced community standing can attract better funding and partnerships
- **Public health:** Long-term improvement in the nation's health profile, with a potential decrease in healthcare costs
- **Economic benefits:** A healthier, more educated populace drives a more productive workforce
- **Social cohesion:** Physical education can promote teamwork and unity, valuable for social harmony

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

# What are Active Schools?

Although lacking a universally accepted definition, active schools share a common approach that emphasizes a comprehensive and strategic promotion of SAPA among students, with a central focus on cultivating and mastering fundamental physical literacy skills. According to Margaret Whitehead, a prominent figure in public health, *“physical literacy can be described as the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to maintain physical activity throughout the life course.”*<sup>7</sup> In addition to the increasing popularity of the concept on the scientific level, the value of physical literacy has also been incrementally acknowledged in practice and policy.

The Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018–2030 (GAPPA) has repeatedly suggested physical literacy as a crucial, promising concept to address people's physical inactivity levels. It is important to recognize that SAPA and physical literacy are intricately intertwined concepts that mutually reinforce each other. When students engage in regular SAPA, it tends to enhance their physical literacy as they become aware of its lifelong benefits physically and mentally. At the same time, physical literacy serves as the gateway to developing a profound understanding of one's own body and mind, fostering a lifelong engagement in SAPA.

Beyond this, it has the potential to improve psychological and social skills, significantly

enhancing both life expectancy and overall quality of life. In essence, physical literacy transcends the boundaries of mere physical education or sports. It is not contingent on inherent ability and is accessible to a wide spectrum of the population.

Physical literacy is fundamentally concerned with human development rather than exclusively nurturing athletes. A child can choose to pursue athletic aspirations, and physical literacy equips them with the necessary skills and opportunities. Simultaneously, a child content with participating in friendly neighborhood games finds equal support within a well-structured physical literacy framework.<sup>8</sup> The comprehensive idea of physical literacy encompasses various individual-centered attributes (physical, cognitive, emotional/psychological) essential for living physically active lives.

In line with this approach, the existing literature suggests that active schools tend to do the following four things at a fundamental level:<sup>9</sup>

- Inspire and provide opportunities for 60+ minutes of daily physical activity in all children (even in resource-poor environments).
- Deliver physical education that is high quality, inclusive, focused on physical literacy skills, and designed to engage and motivate students.

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<sup>7</sup> Margaret Whitehead (ed), *Physical Literacy: Throughout the Lifecourse*, 4-5 (Routledge, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Nandan Kamath, Desh Gaurav Sekhri, and Shubham Jain, 'From Stasis to Movement: Actualising a Fundamental Right to Physical Literacy in India' (The Sports Law and Policy Centre, February 2022), [https://theleaflet.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/REPORT-Vol.II\\_.pdf](https://theleaflet.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/REPORT-Vol.II_.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from: 'Designed to Move: Active Schools Report,' International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education <https://www.icsspe.org/system/files/Designed%20to%20Move%20-%20Active%20Schools%20Report.pdf#:~:text=Great%20ways%20to%20get%20to%2060%20minutes/day:physical%20activity%20throughout%20the%20school%20day.%2031>.

- Proactively create a culture of SAPA for all students, including cultivating teachers, parents, and community members to champion and support physical activity in children.
- Increase accountability on SAPA by treating physical literacy outcomes on par with general literacy and numeracy outcomes and developing robust measurement and reporting processes.

Figure 2: Why are schools the best place to promote physical literacy



# Where are we today?

In principle, there is a commitment to SAPA and physical literacy in Indian schools. There is strong support in constitutional law and international law to recognize the right of every Indian to receive an education on their physical capabilities and be presented with opportunities to explore them mindfully in their youth and continue to do so throughout their lives. The core legislations and government policies highlighted below emphasize the importance of SAPA and its integration into the educational curriculum, acknowledging its holistic benefits for students.

## **The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act**

The Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009<sup>10</sup> guarantees free and compulsory education for all children aged six to fourteen. Under Section 29, state governments must designate an academic authority to establish curricula and evaluation procedures in elementary schools, ensuring they promote holistic child development, maximize physical and mental abilities, and encourage learning through activities. Section 31 of the RTE Act establishes a mechanism to protect children's rights, explicitly including sports equipment and play materials as entitlements.

## **The National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023 (NCF)<sup>11</sup>**

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) incorporates physical

education as a fundamental part of the school curriculum through the National Curriculum Framework (NCF). The NCF outlines key principles for crafting physical education programs, emphasizing the necessity for all students to engage in lifelong physical activities, explore diverse sports and activities, and adhere to age and ability-appropriate rigor in PE. It underscores the equal importance of physical education in a student's overall educational experience. Structured into three developmental stages—Preparatory (Grades 3-5, ages 8-11), Middle (Grades 6-8, ages 11-14), and Secondary (Grades 9-12, with two phases for ages 14-18)—the NCF tailors physical activity (PA) and education recommendations to meet the varying developmental needs of students, promoting physical well-being and holistic development across different educational phases.

## **The National Education Policy (NEP, 2020)<sup>12</sup>**

The NEP notes the pedagogical power that SAPA possesses and recommends its use as a larger developmental tool for children and youth. Importantly, it clearly emphasizes the holistic benefits of SAPA for children (and delinks it from athletic performance). As per the NEP, SAPA integration in education employs physical activities, including indigenous sports, as a cross-curricular pedagogical method to develop skills like collaboration, self-discipline, and teamwork,

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<sup>10</sup> The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, <https://eoc.du.ac.in/RTE%20-%20notified.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023, National Steering Committee for National Curriculum Frameworks (2023), [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/infocus\\_slider/NCF-School-Education-Pre-Draft.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/infocus_slider/NCF-School-Education-Pre-Draft.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> National Education Policy, 2020, Published by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt of India, [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/NEP\\_Final\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf)

and is part of classroom activities to instill fitness as a lifelong attitude, aligning with the Fit India Movement's goals. This approach is recognized for its role in fostering holistic development by promoting physical, psychological well-being, and enhancing cognitive abilities.

### **Khelo India**

The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports also launched the Khelo India initiative which aims to improve the health and well-being of young people and create opportunities for them to receive quality education and training. One of the 12 verticals of the Khelo India program is specifically dedicated to enhancing the physical fitness of school children.

### **Others**

The government has also launched other initiatives to promote engagement in SAPA such as the Fit India Movement. The mission of the Fit India Movement is to bring about behavioral changes and move towards a more physically active lifestyle. The state of Haryana also launched the Play 4 India initiative for schools that made it mandatory for all ongoing school children to participate in at least one sporting activity. In India, there have also been NGOs like Magic Bus India Foundation and Dream a Dream that have developed impactful

SAPA-based programs for children and adolescents.

However, the challenge lies in the lack of concrete action plans, accountability, monitoring, and reporting mechanisms to ensure the effective implementation of these legislations, policies, and initiatives. Sustained engagement and participation are required and there is a need to foster a supportive and inclusive physical literacy culture within schools. Physical literacy also has the potential to be universal and inclusive. It is not tied to age, ability, gender, culture, class, or any other distinction. It provides equal opportunities to learn, grow, and participate to the groups that are often left out from discussions about SAPA – persons with disabilities, adults, women, and historically oppressed communities.

Schools must therefore not only focus on physical infrastructure but also on promoting positive attitudes towards physical literacy, encouraging active participation among students of all abilities, and ensuring equal opportunities for all children to engage in various sports and activities.<sup>13</sup> Strengthening the implementation of policies, providing comprehensive teacher training, addressing infrastructure gaps, and establishing robust monitoring systems are crucial steps to enhance the physical literacy environment for schools and children in India.

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<sup>13</sup> *Supra* note 8.

# What can we learn from other countries?



## Governments

Several countries have implemented comprehensive approaches that prioritize regular physical activity for children, including specific policies that incorporate SAPA and literacy into the school curriculum.

Each of these delivers physical literacy programs through sports and educational systems. Countries work extensively with national sports governing bodies along with schools to introduce children to these concepts, through physical education, community sports, and active play. According to a study by UNESCO, 90% of countries in Asia have legal or de facto requirements for some provision of physical education in schools. These requirements vary widely across Asian

countries<sup>14</sup>. Among other things, many of these approaches highlight the importance of parental support and involvement in promoting SAPA for children and adolescents.

These approaches and initiatives are designed to increase SAPA engagement while also improving motor skills and development, social behaviors, self-efficacy, general feelings of competency, self-worth, pro-school attitudes, motivation, and goal orientation. In the table below, we have highlighted some of the major initiatives undertaken by governments of different countries which relate to introducing physical education interventions at the school or adolescent level, setting guidelines and monitoring physical activity.

*Table 2: Government-led initiatives (select)*

Country	Initiative or Organizer	Description	Insights and key lessons
<b>USA</b>	The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services	Came up with the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans which includes specific recommendations for children and adolescents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage parental involvement; set parents as role models</li> <li>• Schools, policymakers to stress active play opportunities by parents</li> <li>• Promote engaging in family activities</li> <li>• Focus on reducing sedentary behaviors</li> </ul>
<b>Finland</b>	Finnish Schools on the Move is a national program funded by the Ministry of	It aims to establish a physically active culture in Finnish comprehensive schools. Individual schools are given the freedom to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages SAPA by altering rules, improving infrastructure, and shifting values and attitudes.</li> <li>• Boosts teachers' ability to integrate PA into daily lessons, effectively use school facilities and</li> </ul>

<sup>14</sup> The Physical Activity Economy in Asia: Market Size, Participation, Barriers, and Options to Increase Movement, Ophelia Yeung and Katherine Johnston, White Paper for the Asian Development Bank (2020), <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/633886/adou2020bp-physical-activity-economy-asia.pdf>

	Education and Culture	devise and implement their own plans. <sup>15</sup>	<p>technology, and offer necessary support and knowledge.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduces measures such as restructuring the school day, and organizing PA-focused activities, campaigns, and events to boost PA and enhance learning and concentration.</li> </ul>
<b>Denmark</b>	Danish government	In 2012, the Danish government emphasized that 45 minutes of exercise and PA must be part of the integrated school day at all year levels to further the children’s and young people’s state of health and to support their motivation and learning in all subjects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieve broad agreement within the school community regarding the project or policy.</li> <li>• Build confidence in those leading activities.</li> <li>• Establish a dedicated team to motivate, engage, and exchange ideas.</li> <li>• Develop an inclusive, multi-component activity program.</li> <li>• Secure a long-term commitment from the entire school community.</li> </ul>
<b>Australia</b>	Australian Government - Department of Health has developed the Guidelines for Health Growth and Development for Children and Young People	The guidelines have been developed after a rigorous review of scientific evidence from around the world, extensive consultation with stakeholders, state and territory governments, and national and international experts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage children and young people to maintain a well-balanced daily routine, emphasizing PA, limiting sedentary time, and ensuring adequate sleep.</li> <li>• For children not meeting the minimum levels of activity, the guidelines recommend a gradual shift towards these practices.</li> </ul>
<b>China</b>	Ministry of Education (MOE) of the People’s Republic of China	MOE provides standardized teaching materials for the basic content of the curriculum. The basic elements are fundamental motor skills, athletics, games, gymnastics, martial arts, and other traditional sports. <sup>16</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging students to learn through emulation.</li> <li>• Permit schools to offer electives tailored to local priorities and resources.</li> <li>• Develop a curriculum that includes sports knowledge, health and safety, and psychological aspects such as resilience and cooperative skills.</li> </ul>
<b>Japan</b>	Japanese government	Has set primary school, junior high school, and high	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Issue comprehensive guidelines to influence the design of facilities</li> </ul>

<sup>15</sup> FINLAND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FACTSHEET, World Health Organization, [https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/sport/library/factsheets/finland-factsheet\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/sport/library/factsheets/finland-factsheet_en.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Anni Kajanus, Sports, Culture, and Asia, 21:2 Sports, Culture, and Asia (Fall 2016), Cultural Studies, Education, Sociology.

		school curricula including the content of physical education classes and the number of classes provided.	such as playgrounds and gymnasiums,
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## International Organizations

In the realm of international collaboration, some initiatives have emerged to unite member countries under common objectives. An illustrative example of such initiatives is evident in UNESCO's conferences, where member states have convened to adopt outcome documents and alliances that facilitate coordinated actions, promoting advancements in areas like education, sport, and societal development.

In 2017, The Kazan Action Plan was adopted by over one hundred Member States of the UN that attended UNESCO's Sixth International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS VI). The Action Plan marks the commitment to link sport policy development to the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations. One of the specific policy areas of the MINEPS Sport Policy Follow-up Framework is to foster quality physical education and active schools.

In 2023, the Seventh International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS VII) took place in Baku. MINEPS VII was marked by the adoption by acclamation of the Baku Outcome Document and the Fit for Life Global Alliance<sup>17</sup> by over 110 Member States and multiple stakeholders. At the international level, Fit for Life will focus on several components including *"the collation, update*

*and implementation of trainings and curricula to support the development of quality policies and the delivery of inclusive sport and quality physical education in schools, in universities and in communities including via community services that support optimal early childhood development such as pre-schools."*



## Private Initiatives

There have also been private endeavors seeking to positively impact the well-being of children and youth by promoting participation in SAPA. These initiatives are not government-mandated programs but rather collaborative efforts from private entities that recognize the importance of fostering healthier lifestyles among the younger generation.

For example, in the United States, Project Play is an initiative by the Aspen Institute's Sports & Society Program. This program represents a private-sector approach to address the challenges surrounding youth participation in SAPA. Project Play's primary aim is to provide actionable solutions and strategies for schools and communities to ensure that every student can develop through sports engagement. It operates as a comprehensive playbook, offering practical guidelines that educators and local leaders can implement to enhance sports participation among youth.

<sup>17</sup> MINEPS VII Outcome Document: Fit for Life Alliance, International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport, 7th, Baku, 2023, SHS/SPR/2023/MINEPS VII Rev., <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385925>.

In Canada, a private non-profit named ParticipACTION has introduced the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth. The 24-Hour Movement Guidelines represent a holistic approach that goes beyond mere physical activity recommendations. They focus on incorporating elements like sedentary behavior and sleep patterns into a comprehensive framework for healthy living. These are the first evidence-based guidelines to address the whole day. They encourage children and youth to “Sweat, Step, Sleep and Sit” the right amounts for a healthy 24 hours.



### **Physical literacy standards and measurement**

To effectively promote physical literacy in schools, it's imperative to have a comprehensive understanding of the specific skills that need to be cultivated and the methods to accurately assess them. Globally recognized standards for measuring physical

literacy among school-going children encompass holistic frameworks that consider not just physical skills but also the cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of movement.

The Canadian Assessment of Physical Literacy (CAPL) is one such comprehensive tool that evaluates children's motivation, confidence, comprehension, and physical competence in diverse activities. In the UK, the Physical Literacy Framework for Schools provides guidelines based on motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding. Australia's Australian Physical Literacy Framework similarly addresses the intertwined domains of physical, psychological, social, and cognitive capabilities. Though these tools and frameworks might differ slightly in structure or emphasis, the overarching consensus is that physical literacy is multifaceted, integrating physical skills with the emotional, cognitive, and social elements that support lifelong engagement in physical activity.

Table 3: Example of a framework to define and measure physical literacy in schools<sup>18</sup>

### **The Canadian Assessment of Physical Literacy (CAPL)**

CAPL is an initiative spearheaded to provide a comprehensive and standardized means of evaluating physical literacy among children. It offers a holistic understanding of physical literacy, going beyond just competencies to also encompass behavior, motivation, and knowledge.

*Domains:* CAPL examines physical literacy across four main domains:

- **Physical competence:** Evaluates a child's physical abilities, including fitness, motor skills, and anthropometric measures.
- **Daily behavior:** Assesses a child's daily activity levels and sedentary behavior, typically utilizing accelerometers and questionnaires.
- **Motivation and Confidence:** Uses questionnaires to evaluate a child's enjoyment of physical activity, self-efficacy, and benefits-to-barriers ratio.
- **Knowledge and Understanding:** Assesses a child's comprehension of the importance of being active and the broader implications of physical activity on health.

*Target age group:* CAPL is primarily designed for children aged 8 to 12, a crucial age bracket where interventions can have a significant impact on fostering lifelong physical activity habits.

*Components and tools:* The assessment includes a variety of tools, such as the Progressive Aerobic Cardiovascular Endurance Run (PACER) for cardiorespiratory fitness, the CAMSA (Canadian Agility and Movement Skill Assessment) for evaluating motor skills, and questionnaires for gauging knowledge, motivation, and daily behaviors.

*Standardization and scoring:* CAPL offers standardized protocols for assessment and provides a comprehensive scoring system that amalgamates scores across the various domains to give an overall physical literacy score.

*Research and development:* CAPL was developed based on extensive research to ensure its validity and reliability. It is backed by the Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group (HALO) at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute.

*Use cases:* While CAPL was developed in Canada, its comprehensive nature has attracted attention from researchers and educators worldwide. It's seen as a valuable tool for both research and practical interventions, providing insights into the current state of children's physical literacy and areas that may need attention or improvement.

While globally recognized standards offer foundational guidance, it's imperative that physical literacy measurements are tailored to local contexts and cultures. Local traditions, sports, activities, and environmental factors play a significant role in how children engage with movement. Thus, to be truly effective and resonant, standards and assessments should integrate and reflect the unique cultural and contextual nuances of each community or region.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.scribd.com/document/286685086/Canadian-Assessment-of-Physical-Literacy-CAPL>

# What could an active schools framework for India look like?

Creating a relevant framework for active schools in India necessitates a multi-faceted approach that considers diverse factors such as developmental stages, cultural preferences, and safety considerations. The framework's success hinges on aligning the efforts of various stakeholders to enable SAPA for children. Given the constraints of capacity, budgets, and infrastructure in India, the framework's approach must remain adaptable. Continual adjustments are crucial to ensure effectiveness and sustainability in different contexts. Embracing technological tools, data collection, and innovative evaluation frameworks can facilitate measurement and informed decision-making.



## Design principles

Some of the key design principles to be kept in mind while coming up with an active schools framework include:

- ***Policy considerations:*** Focus on a holistic approach to student well-being that includes physical, mental, emotional, and social health, ensuring inclusivity so all children can engage in SAPA.
- ***Comprehensive guidelines:*** Create SAPA guidelines that cater to different developmental stages and cultural contexts, detailing specific activities and their durations.
- ***Inclusivity and addressing barriers:*** Address barriers for marginalized groups to enhance SAPA access across socio-economic, cultural, and geographical contexts.
- ***Obtain buy-in from school principals:*** Engage principals in planning, demonstrating active initiatives' benefits like improved engagement and discipline, making them SAPA advocates.
- ***Recognize the role of parents:*** Equip parents with resources to promote SAPA at home and highlight SAPA's cognitive benefits like improved memory and executive functions.
- ***Integrate SAPA as a compulsory part of the school curriculum:*** Make SAPA compulsory in national education policy, focusing on integration and enforcement issues related to infrastructure.
- ***Build capacity and empower physical education teachers:*** Provide PE teachers with enhanced training to effectively deliver SAPA education and encourage inclusive practices.
- ***Improve infrastructure for SAPA in schools:*** Ensure availability, accessibility, and safety of sports facilities and consider extending access beyond school hours.
- ***A robust monitoring and evaluation system:*** Develop a system to monitor SAPA initiatives' effectiveness, using technology and data to inform policy adjustments and decision-making.



## Draft framework

The following table presents a comprehensive draft framework for active schools in India, encompassing both macro and school-level components. Each component is carefully designed to promote physical activity and well-being among students, with specific descriptions and key/illustrative indicators to guide implementation and monitoring.

Table 4: Components of an active schools framework (indicative)

Component	Description	Illustrative/ Key indicators
<b>Macro Level</b>		
<b>Policies</b>	At a broad level, policies should focus on integrating a comprehensive and age-appropriate SAPA curriculum in all schools. The policies must go beyond traditional sports and include a diverse range of physical activities and traditional sports like yoga, dance, martial arts, recreational games, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outline the required content and suggest the minimum number of hours dedicated to PA per day/week.</li> </ul>
<b>Institution</b>	A representative National Physical Literacy Mission should be established. It should be led by the Ministry of Education for implementation (through the Department of School Education and Literacy), and include the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of AYUSH and NITI Aayog.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Part-time membership and participation by other related ministries along with entities like NCERT, UGC, NAAC, the National Sports University and the proposed National Sports Education Board among others will help build and sustain a comprehensive and collaborative framework.</li> </ul>
<b>Funding/ incentives</b>	This would involve allocating financial resources to schools, providing grants or incentives for PA initiatives, and rewarding schools that excel in promoting SAPA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percentage of the overall budget allocated to SAPA initiatives in schools.</li> <li>Increase in the annual budget for SAPA programs over time.</li> </ul>
<b>Awareness/ campaigns/ celebration</b>	Creating awareness, launching informative campaigns, and celebrating achievements are crucial components of the framework. These efforts shall engage schools, motivate students, and foster a positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of schools reached through awareness campaigns</li> <li>Percentage of students, teachers, parents, and community members aware of the active framework's objectives</li> <li>Number of media outlets covering</li> </ul>

	<p>culture of SAPA in schools.</p> <p>Fit India, Khelo India and other sports, yoga, fitness and wellness initiatives must be used to evangelize and increase public and institutional awareness of the right to physical literacy.</p>	<p>the initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of social media posts, shares, and comments related to the campaigns</li> <li>● Participation in national and international SAPA observances or campaigns (e.g., National Sports Day, World Health Day).</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring/ data collection/ accountability mechanisms</b>	<p>Robust monitoring, data collection, and accountability mechanisms are essential. This involves establishing a comprehensive system to gather data, assess progress, and hold relevant stakeholders accountable for the implementation and outcomes of the framework.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Regular national surveys to assess PA levels, fitness, and health indicators among school children and adolescents</li> <li>● Collection of data on the availability and quality of physical activity infrastructure in schools</li> <li>● Government agencies responsible for monitoring and coordinating the implementation of the SAPA framework</li> <li>● Assessment of changes in SAPA patterns over time and identification of trends</li> <li>● Data collection on parental involvement and awareness of SAPA initiatives</li> <li>● Use of evidence-based research to inform policy decisions and framework improvements.</li> </ul>
<b>Capacity building (PE teachers)</b>	<p>Involves providing comprehensive training, professional development opportunities, and support to Physical Education (PE) teachers to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to effectively deliver high-quality SAPA programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of PE teachers participating in professional development workshops, seminars, and training sessions</li> <li>● Degree of integration of the framework principles and guidelines into PE teacher training programs</li> <li>● Pre- and post-assessment of PE teachers' knowledge and competency in delivering SAPA programs</li> <li>● Availability of resource materials, lesson plans, technology and practical guides for PE teachers to implement effectively</li> </ul>
<b>School Level</b>		
<b>Outcomes - Individual and</b>	<p>By actively engaging in SAPA, students will experience improvements in their physical</p>	<p><i>For individual students</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improvement in fitness levels, measured through standardized</li> </ul>

<p><b>School level</b></p>	<p>health, mental well-being, social skills, and academic performance.</p> <p>The framework must seek to enhance the school's overall environment, academic performance, student well-being, and community engagement.</p>	<p>fitness tests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reduction in the prevalence of obesity and other NCDs</li> <li>● Increase in the number of students meeting recommended PA guidelines.</li> <li>● Correlation between regular PA and improved academic achievement. Increase in focus, attention span, and classroom engagement</li> <li>● Development of teamwork, communication, and leadership skills through participation in team sports and group activities</li> </ul> <p><i>For schools</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Active recess and break times, allowing students to engage in structured and unstructured physical activities</li> <li>● Positive changes in school policies and practices to support PA</li> <li>● Availability of well-maintained and inclusive infrastructure for physical activities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Facilities/ built environment</b></p>	<p>This will address the need for having accessible, safe and well - maintained PA infrastructure in schools. It will set standards for playgrounds, sports fields, and indoor facilities to ensure safety and inclusivity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of schools with open areas, indoor facilities and playgrounds meeting safety and accessibility standards</li> <li>● Ratio of students to available sports facilities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Curriculum</b></p>	<p>A comprehensive and nationwide curriculum must include age-appropriate, evidence-based physical education lessons, opportunities for movement-based learning, and the presence of a comprehensive and nationwide school-level SAPA and physical literacy strategy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Percentage of schools implementing a PE curriculum aligned with national or international guidelines for SAPA in schools</li> <li>● Integration of movement-based learning activities or examples in core subjects like mathematics, science, etc</li> <li>● Grading for students for SAPA efforts and performance, on part with other subjects</li> </ul>
<p><b>Teachers/ administrators</b></p>	<p>Engaging and empowering teachers and school administrators is crucial for successful implementation of the framework. This component focuses on providing training,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of hours of professional development dedicated to SAPA training for teachers and administrators.</li> <li>● Surveys assessing teachers' confidence and competence in</li> </ul>

	support, and resources to educators, enabling them to effectively deliver PA programs and create a supportive environment that fosters student engagement in SAPA.	<p>delivering SAPA programs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of schools with SAPA committees promoting active lifestyles among students and staff.</li> </ul>
<b>Parent engagement</b>	Parents play a pivotal role in supporting and reinforcing SAPA habits among children. The framework must emphasize on fostering strong partnerships between schools and parents, raising awareness about the benefits of SAPA, and involving parents in school-led initiatives to promote active living.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Parent workshops or engagement events focused on SAPA and health promotion.</li> <li>● Parent surveys to assess awareness and attitudes towards SAPA initiatives in schools.</li> <li>● Percentage of parents participating in school-led SAPA events and campaigns.</li> </ul>
<b>Data collection and reporting</b>	Effective data collection and reporting are essential for monitoring progress and evaluating the impact of the framework. This entails establishing a systematic data collection system to track students' SAPA levels, participation rates, and overall well-being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Utilization of fitness trackers or activity monitors to assess students' daily SAPA levels</li> <li>● Frequency of data collection and reporting on students' SAPA levels and fitness</li> </ul>

# What is the way forward?

Young Indians are hailed as our nation's demographic dividend. However, they are not gaining the physical aptitudes and opportunities to lead wholesome, healthy, and productive lives.

Within three decades, this young population will be approaching middle age and with the current trend of non-communicable diseases at that age, India could potentially have a huge healthcare burden. Any serious attempt to address the population-scale inadequacies in fitness, physical aptitude and activity levels must find space primarily in education systems and institutions. However, there are challenges in such a path and these need to be overcome with clarity of approach and coordinated action if we are to bridge the gap between intent and reality.

By strengthening its policy and regulatory framework, India can significantly enhance SAPA opportunities for children and young adolescents in schools. Physical literacy must be treated on par with literacy and numeracy as part of the basic toolkit of education and learning outcomes that every Indian is entitled to receive. Obligations must be squarely placed on education providers to deliver on pre-established metrics. Given its importance throughout one's lifetime, efforts must be made to provide wide access to learning and skilling tools for every Indian.

The journey toward fostering physically active schools in India necessitates an agile and multifaceted approach, one that prioritizes adaptability and aspiration over rigid prescription. As the framework is refined and perfected through ongoing feedback and testing, it must be complemented by the establishment of a dedicated institution, akin to the National Physical Literacy Mission, charged with maintaining a common and adaptable framework for physical activity in schools. This institution would oversee nationwide integration, with a keen focus on capacity building to monitor and evaluate progress. To gain widespread support and enthusiasm for SAPA in schools, an inclusive awareness campaign should be launched, targeting a diverse audience of parents, principals, teachers, and coaches.

Promoting healthy competition, a unique initiative could recognize the 'fittest school in India,' motivating and engaging educational institutions across the nation. Collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including governments, corporates, NGOs, and sports organizations, will be essential in forging cross-cutting partnerships that holistically promote physical literacy in schools. Moreover, India's commitment to continuous research will ensure the adoption of evidence-based practices and innovative strategies, thus facilitating the transition toward a healthier future for its youth.

*Table 5: Reason to move – key stakeholders and why they should care about SAPA in schools*

Stakeholder	Benefits
<b>Students</b>	Improved physical and mental health, enhanced cognitive function, better academic performance, and lifelong healthy habits.
<b>Parents/Guardians</b>	Familial well-being, quality time, lower healthcare expenses, enhanced community engagement.
<b>Teachers</b>	Positive classroom engagement, improved student behavior, and a more dynamic learning environment.
<b>School Administrators</b>	Dynamic school culture, increased attendance, and a reputation for holistic student development.
<b>Healthcare Sector</b>	Reduced childhood obesity and related health issues, leading to lower healthcare burdens.
<b>Government</b>	A healthier population with long life spans, lower healthcare costs, improved academic outcomes, and economic benefits through a more productive workforce.
<b>Sports Organizations</b>	A pipeline for future athletes, increased sports participation, and a healthier, fitter, competitive, and more active nation.
<b>Research Institutions</b>	Evidence-based insights, data for policy-making, and continuous program improvement.

It is imperative that the regulatory framework be both enabling and aspirational, making SAPA and physical literacy achievable within the constraints of diverse school environments. Schools, regardless of their resource limitations, can creatively incorporate SAPA into their curriculum. Whether through yoga, dance, traditional games or alternative approaches, schools can develop long-term roadmaps to align with the framework, ensuring that every institution contributes to the broader goal of nurturing a generation of happier, more engaged children and adolescents.



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