

# Student-Led Health Program

Middle School

High school

Elementary Education



## Intervention Overview

As you begin developing a health improvement program for your school, you might consider the creation of a student-led school health improvement team. Students can help model and promote healthy eating and physical activity habits among their peers. Students on the health improvement team can also assist teachers and school leaders in teaching health education courses. In one school, students led whole-school health and wellness activities, such as a skipping rope contest with fruit kabobs served as refreshments and a winter sledding activity (Gutuskey et al., 2014). Not only will intervention this benefit students on the team who will gain valuable leadership skills and better health habits, but a peer led health program is linked to better acceptance rates and habit development among all participating students (Gutuskey et al., 2014; Stock et al., 2007). Peer leader recruitment, involvement, and training all influence the effectiveness of the intervention, so it is important to carefully consider these variables when implementing this intervention (Christensen et al., 2021).

## Intervention Guide

Grade Level:	All
Materials:	Varies
Duration:	Whole school year; meetings and activities held as often as desired
Implementation:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Determine how students will be recruited (faculty-nomination, peer-nomination, volunteer, etc.) and how many students will participate on the leadership team.</li><li>2. Determine how often the group will meet.</li><li>3. Help students on the health improvement team lead after school programs, teach short lessons to health classes, create health promotion posters and school announcements, or any other activities that help promote your school's health and wellness goals.</li></ol>

## Does it work?

A school in the United States implemented this intervention by recruiting nine third and fourth graders in a school health improvement team (Gutuskey et al., 2014). They investigated their school's physical wellness and organized school wide wellness activities with the help of adult mentors. As a result of this experience, students reported improved leadership skills, such as responsibility and public speaking, and physical health habits (Gutuskey et al., 2014). Additional studies have found that having students on a health leadership team act as peer mentors for younger students in the school is also effective at improving health outcomes and habits (Stock et al., 2007). One program developed in Canada called "Healthy Buddies" paired students in grades 4th-7th, with younger elementary school students. They were tasked with teaching their "buddy" short, weekly lessons focused on nutrition, physical activity, and healthy body image. Students also participated in combined physical education classes with their peer mentors twice a week. This peer-led health promotion program was successful at improving health knowledge and behaviors among all participants, including peer mentors (Stock et al., 2007).

### References:

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- Gutuskey, L., McCaughtry, N., Shen, B., Centeio, E., & Garn, A. (2016). The role and impact of student leadership on participants in a healthy eating and physical activity programme. *Health Education Journal*, 75(1), 27–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0017896914561878>
- Stock, S., Miranda, C., Evans, S., Plessis, S., Ridley, J., Yeh, S. & Chanoine, J. (2007). Healthy buddies: A novel, peer-led health promotion program for the prevention of obesity and eating disorders in children in elementary school. *Pediatrics*, 120 (4), e1059–e1068. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2006-3003>



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