**LIFESTYLE EDUCATION for ACTIVITY PROGRAM**

LEAP is an effective, adaptable, and enjoyable program that encourages and enables girls to learn and practice physical activity skills that will last a lifetime. It offers teachers and other school personnel tools and ideas to:

- Create innovative Physical Education classes for girls, incorporating individual and small group non-competitive activities that keep students moving throughout class and offer them a wide range of choices
- Develop Health Education classes focusing on behavior skills that promote physical activity for a lifetime
- Involve the whole school in promotion of physical activity during and after school hours
- Encourage parents and family members to join students in woman-friendly physical activities
- Enlist community support in providing venues and classes that are exciting for girls and women
Why is a program like LEAP important for the female students in your school district?

- Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both women and men in the United States. In 2002, 696,947 people died of heart disease (51% of them women). This was 29% of all U.S. deaths (source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, [www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/facts.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/facts.htm)).

- Lack of physical activity is a primary risk factor for heart disease, equal to smoking, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.

- Lack of physical activity is also a risk factor for diabetes and other diseases, and is associated with depression and anxiety.

- Girls are less active than boys by 8th grade, and girls’ level of activity declines much more during the high school years. Boys’ activity level drops by 10% between 9th and 12th grades, but girls’ drops by 23% (source needed). I’m not sure about this info as 2005 YRBS indicates something else.

- Needs and preferences differ from those of boys. Boys often cite competition as one of the main reasons for physical activity, while girls more often cite health, fitness, and social benefits. Many girls do not enjoy competitive sports, but nearly all girls enjoy vigorous activity that is interesting and varied and that offers opportunities to participate in small groups.

- Many activities that are easy to make available for girls’ PE classes are also activities that are available in the community and that will carry over into later life. One goal of PE and Health Education should be to equip young women with the skills and confidence to maintain a physically active lifestyle into and through adulthood.

How does LEAP work?

LEAP makes it easy for high schools to provide young women with enjoyable opportunities to exercise that are used consistently. Curriculum materials are provided for both physical education and health education classes. The program includes components for modifying the school environment to be more supportive of an active lifestyle and for engaging the teaching staff, families, and the community.

Instructional components have been developed through research on why girls and young women do or do not participate in regular, vigorous physical activity. Female-only PE classes promote more active involvement and are rated as more enjoyable and satisfying by students (see quotes below). Noncompetitive activities that are fun and relevant to young women, such as aerobics, dance, self-defense, and weight training, have been rated more positively than competitive sports such as basketball or volleyball.
Your school district can develop a program tailored to each school’s unique resources and environment. Administrative support is essential for the success of the program. The essence of LEAP is collaboration on several levels: between administrative personnel, PE teachers, and other LEAP team members; between students, teachers, and families; and between schools and their surrounding communities.

LEAP is coordinated within each school by a LEAP team. The LEAP team leader or “champion” is usually a PE teacher who is enthusiastic about increasing physical activity and providing innovative opportunities for girls. Other team members can include the Health Education teacher, a school administrator, the school nurse, a librarian or media specialist, and/or any other teacher or staff member who is enthusiastic about LEAP.

LEAP has several components:
- Modifying PE classes to meet the needs of girls
- Including behavioral skills for physical activity in Health Education classes
- Promoting faculty/staff wellness and physical activity
- Involving School Health Services and the entire school environment in promoting physical activity
- Using family and community resources to increase activity outside of school

LEAP PE classes:
- Are exclusively or primarily girls-only
- Keep girls active throughout the PE class
- Afford girls lots of activity choices
- Consist of activities that are non-competitive, fun, and meaningful for girls, and that can be enjoyed by women as well: activities to stay fit for life
- Emphasize small-group participation and continuity – everyone has a role
- Teach physical and behavioral skills that will generalize to activities outside school and help girls stay active as adults

What do students and teachers in schools where LEAP has been implemented say?
Teachers and students who have tried LEAP have found that it works beyond their expectations. Here are some quotes from female students (Felton et al., 2005):

I look forward to coming here every day. It is fun and I learned that exercise is fun.

PE is a lot better...it’s a lot of fun to work out with girls...

I used to hate PE, but this year I love it...I really like this program because the boys don’t get in the way and the atmosphere is positive...

...all of us are participating...in my other PE classes, some girls just sat on the floor and watched the rest of us...
Separation from boys helps girls feel better about working out... I want to be stronger and better physically...

Here’s what some PE teachers said (LEAP Intervention Teacher Survey, 1999):

The main difference is that the classes are more segregated (by gender)... the girls were more comfortable in class and participated more... they wanted to work out and enjoyed it the majority of the time... I have not had as many discipline problems.

Students, especially girls, seem more excited about PE than before. They like having more choices...

We have moved to the future of PE with choices and separate girls’ classes. More students participate and really enjoy PE.

The total focus has changed. We are much more organized and focused... Most young ladies’ participation has picked up and the outlook for the future is great.

We have seen a dramatic change in students’ grades... more A’s and definitely more students passing. Also, students are actually becoming more responsible for their own fitness. They do a lot more on their own... much higher percentage dressing out (nearly 100% every day).

I believe being gender-segregated has had the biggest impact on our PE program. It has been amazing to see how much this one change has affected the involvement in our classes. I have had no discipline, management, or apathy problems.

And gender-segregated PE benefits boys as well:

I’ve been teaching boys in PE classes this school year. It’s been great! We haven’t had those problems that you get with boys/girls together. One less problem to deal with in class! Boys seem more involved in class activities and not worried about the girls and how they look or play.

What are some of the activities LEAP schools can offer to girls in PE?
The following list is a starting point; your teachers’ creativity will inspire more ideas. Schools may differ in resources such as a pool, a racquetball court, and usable outside space, but all schools will have a gym where many of these activities can be held. Some activities require planning for field trips.

Aerobics: low-impact, step, kick-boxing
Archery
Badminton
Canoeing
Dancing – ballroom, line, jazz, modern, folk
Dance Dance Revolution (dance video game)
Gymnastics
Hiking/orienteering
Jogging or race-walking
Lifesaver training
Martial arts: karate, aikido, t’ai chi
Racquetball
Rock climbing/rappelling
Scuba diving
Self-defense
Skiing – cross-country, downhill
Table tennis
Tennis – singles, doubles
Weight training
Wii (sports video game)

What needs to be done before a “LEAP year” begins?
During the year prior to implementation of LEAP, it’s important for each school to plan ahead. Here is a checklist of preparations for each school:

- Pull together a committed LEAP Team of at least three people, ideally PE and Health Education teachers and a school administrator.
- Give the Activity Survey to girls in PE classes. This will enable you to plan activities that your female students want to try and will be excited about.
- Talk with representatives of your school administration, media lab, library, school newspaper, and other school departments that can help you with resources and publicity for LEAP. Make plans with them to have things ready to roll in the fall when LEAP begins.
- Think about female physical-activity role models you might ask to come and speak to students during your first LEAP year. They may need a lot of lead time to schedule their visit, but they may be happy to donate the time. Many athletes are enthusiastic about talking with young women about an active lifestyle.
- Look into venues for activities the students want to try that may require outside resources. Some examples might include field-trip activities like canoeing, hiking, or skiing. Others might be activities housed at school, but that require special equipment, like scuba diving, archery, or tennis, or expertise that no teacher may have, like line dancing or self-defense. If you plan to offer these activities in the fall, plans may need to be made during the preceding spring.
- Research the resources for physical activity in your community. They may be helpful in offering space for PE activities, as well as for planning assignments for your students to do out-of-school activities with or without family members. Check with local sports shops about how they might help. Work with your local recreation department and/or YMCA to collaborate on ways to provide “new” activities for the students in your classes.