

Researchers expand program to build comprehensive approach to school wellness

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An Iowa State University research team is working with elementary schools to improve academic outcomes through [SWITCH](#) – a program aimed at getting children to "switch what they do, view and chew."

The team, led by Greg Welk, a professor of kinesiology, is working to refine the SWITCH program. They received a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to develop and test school-based components designed to enhance the effectiveness and the sustainability of the program. The new program includes modules specifically for physical education classes, lunchroom nutrition and the regular classroom.

Welk says most schools have wellness committees working to improve student health, but struggle with how to get kids to eat better and be more active. SWITCH allows schools to choose lesson plans that best fit their needs to promote physical activity and a healthy lifestyle. Welk says it's similar to a workplace wellness initiative in that programming benefits both the school and the students.

"Schools have now realized that school wellness programming can directly contribute to better [academic outcomes](#). Recent studies, for example, have shown that physical activity breaks can help to improve time on task and improve cognitions. These findings have led to more interest in school programming designed to promote [physical activity](#) and healthy lifestyles," Welk said.

Iowa State researchers know SWITCH works. They have introduced

hundreds of families to the program and found children who participate in the program watch less TV and eat more fruits and vegetables. That's why researchers want to incorporate Switch at school and make it a community-wide effort.

"The real value of SWITCH is that it gets students, parents, teachers, and the full [school](#) community working together to improve student outcomes without adding a lot of work for teachers or parents," said Douglas Gentile, an associate professor of psychology.

Provided by Iowa State University

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