

Push-up/Sit-up Challenge Evaluation Results 2008 - 2012



Report Prepared by
Karen Armstrong

Push-up/Sit-up Challenge

In March 2008, the *in motion* Children & Youth Committee expanded and took the idea of a push-up/sit-up challenge from St. John Catholic School, Guelph as they had run a push-up challenge internally for several years. Dave De Burger a teacher at St. John's developed the challenge in response to a lack of upper body strength he was witnessing in students.

St. John's challenged other elementary schools across Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph to participate in a push-up and sit-up challenge.

The purpose of the challenge was 3-fold:

- To increase the minutes per week of physical activity, within or outside of physical education class
- To improve the fitness level of students; and
- To expose students to activities that have the potential to instill lifetime healthy behaviors and motivate them to be more physically active.

The reason for the concerted effort was to combat one of the greatest health threats to all age groups, and that is the growing obesity epidemic taking place across North America. We know that youth aged 15 to 19 have increased their waist circumference by more than triple since 1981. From 2007 to 2009, 17% of Canadian children and youth were overweight and 9% were obese. Fitness levels have also declined significantly since 1981, regardless of age or sex.ⁱ

6 elementary schools participated in the first push-up/sit-up challenge in 2008 with the average elementary school student/staff member completing 188 push-ups or sit-ups over 5 days, for an average of 37.6 per day. A total of 329,680 push-ups and sit-ups were completed by the 6 elementary schools.

The winning elementary school was offered 2 hours of free ice time.

The *in motion* Management Committee also took the push-up challenge and included sit-ups to allow those who could not participate in a push-up challenge for medical reasons. The WDG *in motion* management committee members participate in the challenge completing more than 300 push-ups and sit-ups per person.



“Sit-ups and push-ups help tone and develop lean and strong muscles. Sit-ups work your core and lower back muscles; push-ups work upper and lower body muscles. With regular practice, these combined exercises will help you maintain overall stamina, balance and health.”

<http://www.livestrong.com/article/269254-what-are-the-benefits-of-sit-ups-push-ups/>

In 2009, KidsAbility joined the Children & Youth Committee and provided a list of alternative activities (e.g., modified push-ups) for elementary school aged children with physical and mental challenges to ensure as many children could participate as possible.

During the 5 years of the challenge, the timing of the challenge has changed. The challenge has always been for 5 consecutive weekdays but the time of the school year has rotated to determine the best time of year to ensure the highest participation rates. Initially the challenge was run during *in motion* week (first full week of October) but was moved as it was too close to the Terry Fox run and schools found it a busy time of year. Additionally, the challenge was offered during the winter to encourage physical activity at a time when rates typically drop.

In 2010, 17 organizations participated in the challenge, including 15 elementary schools, 1 secondary school (pilot) and 1 private organization.

In 2012, 17 elementary schools took the challenge and ran it the week before March Break but again it was felt to be too busy a time for the challenge. The Committee is looking at April for the challenge in 2013.

In 2010 the Children & Youth Committee expanded the challenge to embrace childcare centres, with a hop/skip/jump challenge. 7 child care centres participated with a total of 150,379 hops/skips/jumps. The winning site completed an average of 584 jumps, hops & skips over the 5 days per capita.

In 2012, 8 sites participated in the hop/skip/jump challenge with the University of Guelph Child care centre winning, with 1,413 jumps/hops/skips per capita. The total number of hops/skips and jumps in 2012 was 329,176. This is an increase of **219%** since 2010.

In 2012, the challenge celebrated 5 years of activity, minus 2009 in which H1N1 hindered any public health staff from supporting and implementing any activities in the schools or participating on committees.

2012	Amount of Push-ups/sit-ups per capita
St. John Catholic School, Guelph	509
St. Mary Catholic School, Elora	430
St. Paul Catholic School, Guelph	300
Total # of Participating Schools	17

In 2012 47% of Catholic elementary schools participated in the challenge and 8% of public elementary schools. The percentages have increased dramatically since 2008 when 7% of public schools and 12% of Catholic schools participated. In addition we have seen an increase in the number of push-ups and/or sit-ups required to win. The first year the average number of push-ups/sit-ups that won in 2008 was 246 per capita while in 2012 the number had increased to 509, which is an increase of **207%**!

“My children came home from school and told us about the push-up/sit-up challenge and requested that their Dad get down on the floor with them and practice doing the push-ups as well as the sit-ups. It was great to seeing the entire family being active. Keep up the good work!”

St. Paul Catholic School Guelph Parent, 2012

Lessons Learned

- Schools prefer the challenge vs. a draw
- “It is a great opportunity to teach proper form”
- “It creates great spirit in the school as everyone is working together”
- People want a quick turn around on the announcement of the winners to ensure momentum is maintained
- “It benefits not only students but staff and parents...great to involve as many people as possible to increase physical activity...keep it up!”
- “The challenge reduces the amount of sedentary activities in a school day”
- When teachers embrace the challenge, they often carry it with them to a new school, which s/he transfers to
- School champions, Child Care Centre champions, QCCI Coordinator and Public Health Nurses are integral to increasing the number of schools and child care centres participating
- Prizes are worthwhile as they increase school participation rates.

Next Steps

- Build on the momentum established over the last 5 years and offer the challenge in April 2013
- Continue to provide prizes – a good incentive – competitive spirit is welcomed!
- Re-visit having school board reps on committee
- Continue sponsorship partnership with The Cooperator’s.

The in motion Children & Youth Committee partners include: the Quality Child Care Initiative, University of Guelph Child Care Centre, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health, YMCA-YWCA of Guelph, Heart & Stroke Foundation and volunteers.

¹ Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health, “Community Picture: A Report Prepared for the Purpose of Planning Healthy Communities”, Phase I, 2011.