

HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (HEPA)  
+  
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)



## Using healthy eating and physical activity as a vehicle to build students' social and emotional skills and competencies

Taking a comprehensive approach to wellness—which includes healthy eating and physical activity and extends to additional aspects of health, such as social and emotional skills and competencies—can provide the necessary supports to help healthy children grow into healthy adults. Afterschool and summer learning programs are well-situated to be a component of solutions that address the whole child. Children in quality programs have access to healthy snacks and meals, take part in physical activities, feel safe and supported by caring mentors, work collaboratively with peers, develop new skills, and gain confidence as they learn to set goals and make responsible decisions for themselves.

### Overview

*Coaching Corps* is a coalition of thousands of community members, civic-minded organizations, and college students committed to inspiring and mentoring underserved youth through the power of sports. By partnering with more than 100 afterschool and summer programs in low-income neighborhoods in ten major markets across five states, Coaching Corps offers sports as a youth development tool by training volunteer coaches and afterschool staff to teach kids persistence, optimism, self-regulation, and empathy on and off the field.

### A typical day for students

Although Coaching Corps volunteers coach sports ranging from soccer and basketball to ultimate Frisbee, a typical day can be broken down into three general segments: 1) participating in an opening circle, 2) practicing a sports skill, and 3) cooling down and reflecting. During the opening circle, coaches check in with their team to see how they are feeling and then introduce the skill that the day's practice will focus on (persistence, optimism, self-regulation, or empathy). Next, the team participates in a sports activity, often selected by the kids. Cool down time is used to discuss the day's chosen topic. For instance, if the topic is persistence, a coach might ask teammates to share an example of someone demonstrating persistence. A game is scheduled at the end of every season for students to work toward a culminating event.

## Coaching Corps

Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Los Angeles,

Oakland, Orlando, Sacramento, San Diego,

San Francisco, San Jose

30,000

Average number of students served during the school year

80%

Students from low-income families

### Main funding sources:

- ▶ Individual Giving
- ▶ Foundations
- ▶ Corporations

## Outcomes

A two-year evaluation completed in 2007 found that youth participating in Coaching Corps' sports programs showed improvement in their self-efficacy, confidence, physical activity, ability to work in a team, ability to make new friends, and assessment of their own skills. A three-year evaluation of the program between 2010 and 2013 found that across all three years, students on average saw an increase in their fitness scores.

## Program characteristics

The program views coaches as the main ingredient in a positive experience for low-income youth, thus focusing on ensuring its coaches are trained in techniques to foster a physically and emotionally safe environment, build students' sports and life skills, and provide encouragement and constructive feedback.

In addition to training interested partner-afterschool program staff, Coaching Corps recruits college students and community members to become volunteer coaches. Karen Florian, a volunteer coach and student at California State University, Northridge said of her experience, "Coaching Corps provides an equal opportunity for all youth. . .to develop emotionally, socially and physically. With Coaching Corps, families don't have to worry about the financial pressures that often come with sports programs, so kids can just play. I saw the girls on my team learn to believe in themselves and their potential to become future leaders."

## Program history

Coaching Corps was first established in the late 1990s as Team-Up for Youth, working to ensure that children in low-income communities had the same opportunities to play sports as their higher-income peers. It provided funding to afterschool programs in low-income communities to hire coaches, who Team-Up for Youth would train how to coach and work with youth. In 2012, the program transformed into Coaching Corps, transitioning from a grant-making strategy to a recruitment and training strategy that would find, coach, and place trained coaches in afterschool programs, ultimately training more than 10,000 coaches who have coached more than 130,000 students to date.

## Recommendations

*for using healthy eating and physical activity as a vehicle to build students' social and emotional skills and competencies:*

- ▶ Sports with a trained coach is a powerful tool to develop students' social and emotional skills and competencies, engage students, and help them become their best selves.
- ▶ Training for staff and coaches is critical on how to foster social and emotional learning and how to serve as informal mentors to kids.



## Challenges

***National public health issues among children today are physical, and social, and emotional.*** The National Survey of Children's Health found that close to 1 in 3 children are overweight or obese, placing them at a higher likelihood for a number of health issues including asthma and high blood pressure. Additionally, 45 percent of children in the U.S. have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE), which has been linked to negative health outcomes and behaviors.

***There are linkages between children's physical and social and emotional health.*** While one does not automatically lead to the other, research has found that children who are obese are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety, and studies have shown the association between ACEs and a higher likelihood of being overweight and obese.

***Issues in childhood have long reaching effects.*** ACEs have been linked to negative health issues in adulthood, such as a higher likelihood of drug abuse and heart disease, and obesity in childhood has been associated with a higher likelihood of obesity in adulthood. At a national level, the estimated lifetime economic costs of ACEs are \$124 billion and obesity is \$150 billion.

Read [A Big-Picture Approach to Wellness: Afterschool Supporting Strong Bodies and Minds](#) to learn more.