

# Expanded Opportunities for Physical Activity Throughout the School Day:

*Incorporating More Movement into New Orleans Classrooms Using Instant Recess® and Other In-Class Physical Activity Breaks*



IT'S GOOD FOR YOU  
REMEMBER TO  
STRETCH

INSTANT RECESS®  
ROCK ON!  
Move, Spin, Shake  
Don't Stay STILL!  
JUMP  
Run in Place



t's after lunch, and some of Ms. Neujean's students are beginning to nod off in the middle of class. Ms. Neujean takes notice, and with one click of a mouse, has her students alert and on their feet!

At Samuel J. Green Charter School, Ms. Neujean uses Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks with her class as a substitute for recess when outdoor play is unavailable or to reengage her students when she notices that they are losing focus.

**“I learned how beneficial it was to provide a quick break when students started to get sleepy in the afternoon. My students began to ask for it when they saw others getting sleepy. It really did rejuvenate them. I was worried that it would be hard for them to settle down when we were finished, but that was not the case. They usually went right back to work without a problem.”**

— Ms. Neujean, 1st Grade Teacher

### **Physical Activity: Recommendations, Realities & Benefits**

Many students spend up to nine hours a day at school and are inactive most of that time. There is a national recommendation that youth participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day.<sup>1</sup> Physical activity in youth can improve strength and endurance; help build strong bones and muscles; help control weight; reduce anxiety and stress; increase self-esteem; and improve blood pressure and cholesterol levels.<sup>2</sup> Physical activity can also help youth improve their concentration, memory, and classroom behavior.<sup>3</sup>

Schools can promote physical activity by offering a variety of opportunities before, during and after the school day, including physical education, recess, in-class physical activity breaks, intramural physical activity clubs and interscholastic sports.

School Health Connection (SHC), a program of the Louisiana Public Health Institute, has been working to increase physical activity in New Orleans schools by incorporating more movement into classrooms since 2011. Over the past three years, SHC has trained more than 400 school staff to integrate Instant Recess® and other in-class physical activity breaks into the school day.

### **Instant Recess®**

Physical activity breaks are bursts of physical activity that are integrated into the school day; composed of a series of simple, easy-to-learn movements; and designed to require minimal disruption of routine. To meet the national recommendation that youth be physically active for at least 60 minutes daily, physical activity breaks are needed throughout the school day.

In late 2010, SHC partnered with the late Dr. Antronette (Toni) Yancey — a professor in the Department of Health Services at the UCLA School

of Public Health and a public health practitioner in the field of obesity, nutrition, physical fitness and chronic disease prevention—to bring Instant Recess® to New Orleans schools. Instant Recess® is one example of a physical activity break program that can be easily implemented by schools. Instant Recess® 10-minute physical activity breaks, created and trademarked by Dr. Yancey, are available online and on DVD and are composed of a series of simple aerobic dance and calisthenics movements.<sup>4</sup> These easy-to-learn exercises can be performed by individuals of different fitness levels at varying levels of intensity. Instant Recess® is designed to require minimal disruption of routine and to be used by anyone, anytime, anywhere.

Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks are part of the solution to the lack of physical activity provided for children and also a way for teachers to reenergize students and draw their attention back to learning.

### **Other In-Class Physical Activity Breaks**

There are a variety of other physical activity breaks, sometimes referred to as brain breaks, available in addition to Instant Recess®. Over the past three years, SHC has identified physical activity breaks of varying styles and durations available online and at no cost. Some physical activity breaks are academically themed, for example, allowing students to count aloud by ones, twos, fives, or tens while stepping, hopping, or circling along.

Teachers can use physical activity breaks in whatever way works best for them and their students. Some teachers choose to offer physical activity breaks at the same time each day, for example, as a transition from lunch time to class time or to reenergize students after nap time. Other teachers choose to use physical activity breaks more reactively, when they see that their students have either an excess of energy that needs to be released or when they see that their students have lost focus and would benefit from an energy boost.





Samuel J. Green Charter School participating in a physical activity break.

### **Introducing New Orleans Schools to Instant Recess®**

SHC initially brought Instant Recess® to New Orleans as a solution to the lack of physical activity being provided for high school students. The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education only requires that high school students receive 1 1/2 semesters of physical education.<sup>5</sup>

In 2011, SHC collaborated with Gramercy Research Group to create three new Instant Recess® physical activity breaks for New Orleans students by New Orleans students. Gramercy Research Group had experience successfully implementing and evaluating Instant Recess® in Winston-Salem, NC schools. Instant Recess® had previously been used primarily in elementary and middle schools, so particular effort was made to make these new Instant Recess® breaks more appealing to high school students.

SHC partnered with students from O. Perry Walker College and Career Preparatory (since merged with another high school and now known as L.B. Landry - O.P. Walker College and Career Preparatory High School), Warren Easton Charter High School, and Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools to create these three new Instant Recess® breaks. The students had a significant role in every aspect of creation, including selecting the music, developing the moves, and starring in the videos. To further increase appeal, the students were filmed in front of a green screen allowing photographs of New Orleans landmarks like the Superdome, St. Charles Streetcar, Mississippi River Bridge, Jackson Square, and Mardi Gras World to be inserted as backdrops. Additionally, one of the breaks features a cameo by members of the Honeybees, the dance team of the New Orleans Hornets (the NBA team now known as the New Orleans Pelicans). These Instant Recess® breaks are available on DVD and on YouTube and currently available for use in schools locally and nationally.

### **Piloting Instant Recess® in New Orleans High Schools: An Evaluation**

In early 2012, SHC piloted Instant Recess® in two New Orleans high schools—Warren Easton Charter High School and New Orleans Charter Math & Science High School (SciHigh)—as part of an evaluation to measure its effects on student behavior and examine its efficacy in the high school setting.

SHC recognized that implementing Instant Recess® in high schools could be challenging given its previous use primarily in elementary and middle schools. Due to the challenges in keeping high school students active, there was value in piloting the program and conducting an evaluation in this setting.

The high school pilot produced mixed results and revealed a number of challenges related to school support, student interest, and scheduling. It is, however, important to note that many of the challenges were associated with program evaluation activities and not the implementation of Instant Recess® itself. There were several program evaluation activities including a student baseline survey, classroom observations, and teacher logs. SHC also set a goal of providing students with 20-30 minutes of Instant Recess® throughout the day. School cooperation was high at the onset of the evaluation, but diminished as evaluation activities increased. The implementation of Instant Recess® as a program also presented challenges in the high school setting. Many teachers were unwilling or at least hesitant to sacrifice instructional time for physical activity, especially in the school with 45-60 minute class periods. In the case of a block schedule (90-minute class periods), teachers were generally more receptive to offering Instant Recess® physical activity breaks.

Given the results of the pilot and associated evaluation, particularly the

challenges identified, SHC identified the following recommendations for moving forward:

- Emphasize the use of Instant Recess® and other in-class physical activity breaks in elementary school settings. The pilot revealed both structural and monitoring challenges to implementing Instant Recess® in the high school setting. High school students also seemed to be more self-conscious, at times seeming uncomfortable or disinterested in participating.
- Regardless of school setting, allow the program to proceed more organically and less prescriptively. Engage teachers after securing administrative support and allow participation to be voluntary, encouraging teachers to use Instant Recess® in a way that meets their individual classroom needs. Note that this would prohibit a full-scale, rigorous evaluation of the program, but is expected to increase participation.
- Build student demand to increase school support and student participation. Nurture demand by having students advocate for the program.
- When pursuing a full-scale, rigorous program evaluation, carefully select schools after disclosure and acceptance of all participation requirements.

### **Building Student Demand: Youth Advocacy Around Instant Recess® by Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools**

SHC furthered its partnership with Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools through the 2012-2013 school year to build youth demand and increase school buy-in for Instant Recess®.

Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools is a youth organizing and leadership development organization that uses participatory education and action research to build organizing and leadership skills among New Orleans youth.<sup>6</sup> The Rethinkers advocated for the use of Instant Recess® through a variety of channels. At their annual summer press conference, the Rethinkers presented the use of Instant Recess® as one of their recommendations to school leaders. The Rethinkers also led a seminar at the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine titled “Instant Recess: Rethinking the School Day.”

Through generous funding provided by Save-A-Lot and the Texas Health Institute, SHC and Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools attended the 6th Annual Southern Obesity Summit held in Charlotte, NC in 2012. The funding was awarded to Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools in recognition of their efforts to improve nutrition and physical activity for youth. The Southern Obesity Summit is the largest regional obesity

prevention event in the United States, drawing hundreds of attendees and serving as a catalyst for change.<sup>7</sup> The Southern Obesity Summit has a focus on youth leadership; bringing youth together to identify effective strategies, share experiences, and provide their perspectives on creating environments to support healthy eating and physical activity. As youth attendees, the Rethinkers were able to participate in a variety of activities supporting youth leadership.

**“My students love Instant Recess® and finish their work so that they don’t have to miss out on it.”**

— Ms. Baram, Special Ed 1-4 Teacher

### **Expanding the Implementation of Instant Recess® and other Physical Activity Breaks in New Orleans Schools**

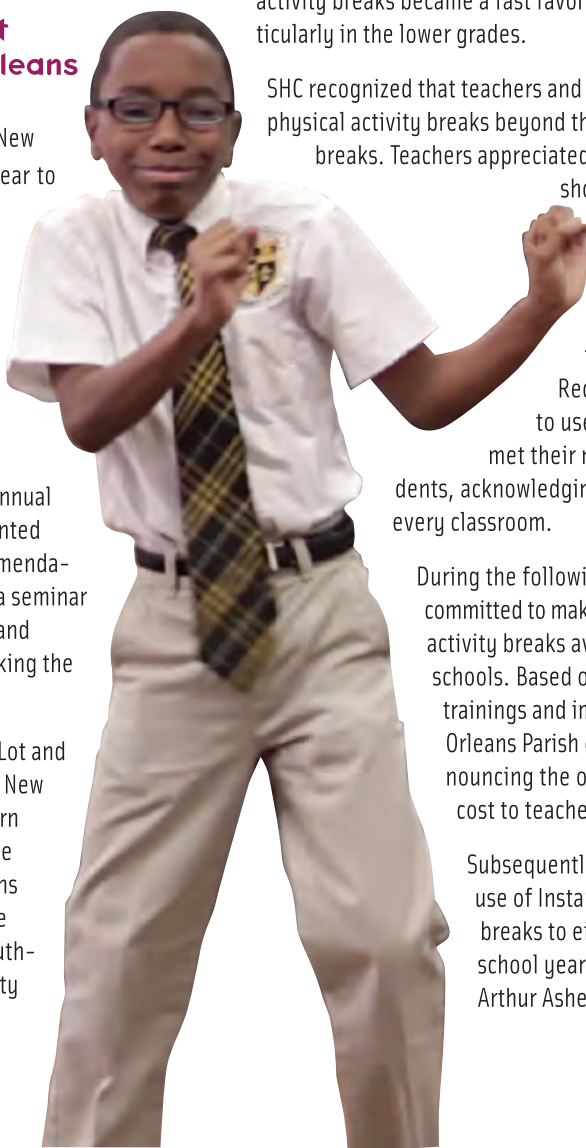
During the 2012-2013 school year, SHC expanded the implementation of Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks into its School Wellness Program partner schools. Trainings for school staff were offered at Arthur Ashe Charter School, John Dibert Community School, Samuel Green Charter School, and Langston Hughes Academy—all part of the FirstLine Schools network. Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks became a fast favorite of teachers and students, particularly in the lower grades.

SHC recognized that teachers and students preferred a variety of physical activity breaks beyond the Instant Recess® physical activity breaks. Teachers appreciated the flexibility of offering breaks of shorter durations and varying styles.

SHC identified a number of other physical activity breaks available online and at no cost and created a resource list to share with teachers in addition to distributing Instant Recess® DVDs. SHC encouraged teachers to use the breaks in whatever way best met their needs and the needs of their students, acknowledging that the use may be different in every classroom.

During the following school year (2013-2014), SHC committed to making Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks available to all interested New Orleans schools. Based on the successes of the most recent trainings and implementation, SHC contacted all Orleans Parish elementary/middle schools announcing the opportunity to offer a training at no cost to teachers.

Subsequently, SHC offered trainings around the use of Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks to eight schools during the 2013-2014 school year. Trainings were again offered at Arthur Ashe Charter School, John Dibert Com-





Students at Success Preparatory Academy participating in a physical activity break.

munity School, Samuel Green Charter School, and Langston Hughes Academy. These schools were trained a second time in part to account for staff turnover rates but also to reach more school staff. When the training was initially offered, most school leaders only elected to send select staff members. Owing to the success of the program, when the training was offered again, the school leaders set aside time during the summer professional development schedule to have all school staff trained. In addition to those four schools, SHC also trained staff at Medard H. Nelson Charter School, Dwight D. Eisenhower Academy, ReNEW Schaumburg Elementary and Success Preparatory Academy.

**“I use physical activity breaks in the morning to wake them up. It helps them get some energy out before we start our day. It lets me get my energy up too!”**

— Ms. Sanderson, 2nd Grade Teacher

**Figure 1. Number of participating schools and number of school staff trained.**

School Year	# of Participating Schools	# of School Staff Trained
2010-2011	1	11
2011-2012	2	26
2012-2013	4	75
2013-2014	8	310

### Monitoring the Use of Instant Recess® & Other Physical Activity Breaks in New Orleans Classrooms

Given that the state of Louisiana requires each public K-8 school to provide a minimum of 30 minutes of quality moderate to rigorous physical activity each day, it is important for participating schools to monitor their Instant Recess and other physical activity breaks programming as part of this fulfillment.<sup>5</sup> Owing to the challenges presented during the rigorous evaluation in early 2012, SHC created a simplified evaluation plan. Participating teachers are asked to complete a two-page log to track the use of Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks in their classrooms. The first page of the log indicates the class subject, grade, class enrollment, and contact information. In addition teachers are asked to record how many minutes of Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks were used each day during a given period of time (generally a 4-6 week period) and to also indicate if they participate along with their students. The second page of the log asks teachers to briefly respond to ten qualitative questions such as, “How do you think your students felt about doing Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks?” and “Do you feel like using Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks improved student on-task behavior?”

Recognizing that participation in the program and the evaluation are voluntary, SHC created an incentive program to increase teacher and student participation in Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks as well as to increase the submission of teacher logs. Teachers are incentivized with a modest gift card for submitting a completed log and students are incentivized through a school-based competition that awards the class that uses Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks most frequently. Class awards have included hula hooping exercise parties, fitness equipment, classroom-based physical activity resources, and healthy luncheons.

Quantitatively capturing the success of Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks in New Orleans schools has proved somewhat difficult. The program has thrived when allowed to grow organically, making mandatory participation in evaluation activities somewhat counterintuitive. The voluntary teacher logs, particularly when incentivized, have been successful in capturing feedback and monitoring the use of Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks, but based on feedback from schools, SHC is aware that many more teachers are using Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks than is being formally reported.

### Promoting Instant Recess® and Other Physical Activity Breaks in New Orleans Schools

To share and promote program benefits and successes, SHC partnered with FirstLine Schools in 2014 to create a brief video that highlights the use of Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks in New Orleans schools. The video features testimonials from students, teachers, and school administrators. An overview of the program is provided by an SHC School Wellness Coordinator and students are shown actively participating in the program. The video qualitatively captures what has at times been a challenge to capture quantitatively—that Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks are being successfully used in many New Orleans classrooms. The video, available on the SHC YouTube ([www.youtube.com/user/schoolhealthconnect](http://www.youtube.com/user/schoolhealthconnect)) and Facebook ([www.facebook.com/schoolhealthconnection](http://www.facebook.com/schoolhealthconnection)) pages, has been and will continue to be used as both a reporting and promotional tool.





*School Health Connection presented with local innovator award*

## SHC Receives Local Innovator Award in Recognition of its Leadership in School-Based Physical Activity

In 2012, SHC was presented with the Local Innovator Award from the Physical Activity Special Interest Group of the Society of Behavioral Medicine for its implementation and evaluation of Instant Recess® in New Orleans schools. The Society of Behavioral Medicine is a multidisciplinary organization of clinicians, educators, and scientists dedicated to promoting the study of the interactions of behavior with biology and the environment, and the application of that knowledge to improve the health and well-being of individuals, families, communities and populations.<sup>8</sup> The Local Innovator Award recognizes an organization or individual who has made innovations and important contributions to the advancement of physical activity on a local level.

### Recommendations

This report has pointed out many benefits of incorporating Instant Recess® and other in-classroom physical activity breaks into the school day. Although many schools have begun to take advantage of this low-cost, high-return program, there are many others that are not participating. SHC sees opportunities to improve and expand Instant Recess® and other in-classroom physical activity breaks locally and beyond.

**“Nearly four years of programming Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks in New Orleans schools have yielded a number of lessons learned. There have been challenges and there have been successes.**

— Dr. Marsha Broussard, SHC Program Director

SHC offers the following recommendations to ensure program success:

1. Allow for the organic success of the program by allowing participation to be voluntary and not required. Exposing school staff to the concept of Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks and encouraging teachers to try the program in their classrooms has

been successful in incorporating more movement into the school day.

2. Encourage school leaders to openly show support of Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks so that teachers feel confident offering the program in their classrooms. School leadership support of Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks is essential to its success. Teachers are more likely to embrace the program if they feel that they have the support of school leadership. Encourage school leaders to mention and showcase physical activity breaks during morning meetings, assemblies, etc. The program is even more successful with support at the school district/charter management organization level. A comprehensive school/district wellness policy that encourages the use of physical activity breaks would further demonstrate commitment.
3. Emphasize the use of Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks at the elementary school level, particularly in the lower (K-3) grades. Ongoing monitoring has shown greatest success amongst these grades. As demonstrated by our evaluation, the program is not very successful in the high school setting and would require significant adaptation to appeal to older students.
4. Create more physical activity breaks of varying styles and durations, particularly those with faster tempos and a vocal component. Experience has shown that students, particularly those in grades K-3, are more engaged with and excited by physical activity breaks that they can sing along with; like those that allow them to count aloud or those with an easy to learn song.

**“My students loved it! We made it into a competition where I would pick a student who was really exercising vigorously to be the one who got to select the next physical activity break that we did.”**

— Ms. Walsh, K-2 Teacher

### Success with Sustainability

Unlike many other programs, implementing Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks comes at a very low cost. There is a small cost at onset for Instant Recess® DVDs and incentives, but thereafter the program can be used indefinitely without incurring additional costs.

If needed, the costs associated with the distribution of Instant Recess® DVDs and incentives could potentially be eliminated. Most of the Instant Recess® physical activity breaks available on DVD are also available on YouTube. As long as classrooms have access to the internet and a projector or promethean board, which most do, teachers can access Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks at any time with no cost. SHC has already made efforts to reduce DVD distribution in light of this fact.

SHC will continue to incentivize the program, so long as funding is available, to increase participation in the voluntary monitoring and reporting activities so that valuable feedback can be obtained.





Arthur Ashe Charter School participating in a physical activity break

In addition, there are a number of small grants available to schools, through programs like Fuel Up to Play 60, that could be used to fund a physical activity break program. However, the success of the program would not likely be compromised by the discontinuation of incentives, especially if endorsed by the school leadership.

SHC has received considerable positive feedback around the sustainability of the program in New Orleans schools. The support of school leadership is the most important sustainability factor, as demonstrated by FirstLine Schools. At the start of the 2014–2015 school year, the Director of Culture & Wellness at FirstLine Schools renewed the network's commitment to the program by offering brief refresher trainings around Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks at each of the network's five schools. In addition, FirstLine Schools appointed school-based ambassadors to lead their favorite physical activity breaks and offer testimonial about the program during the professional development period ahead of the new school year. The demand for physical activity breaks is not just coming from students, it's coming from school staff too. In response, physical activity breaks were offered daily for staff during this professional development period. FirstLine Schools is also working to identify additional options for classroom-based breaks to promote wellness such as "instant yoga".

At Success Preparatory Academy, another school trained by SHC to offer Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks, the 2014–2015 professional development period also started with an administrator-led presentation reminding returning staff and informing new staff about the value of using physical activity breaks in the classroom. This presentation was accompanied with a demonstration led by a teacher who has been using the program with her students.

### **SHC's Commitment to Maintain the Movement**

Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks are one part of SHC's and the wider community's response to reversing obesity trends and

promoting overall health and wellness in New Orleans. To meet the national recommendation that youth participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day, short intervals of physical activity—like recess and in-class physical activity breaks—are needed throughout the school day.

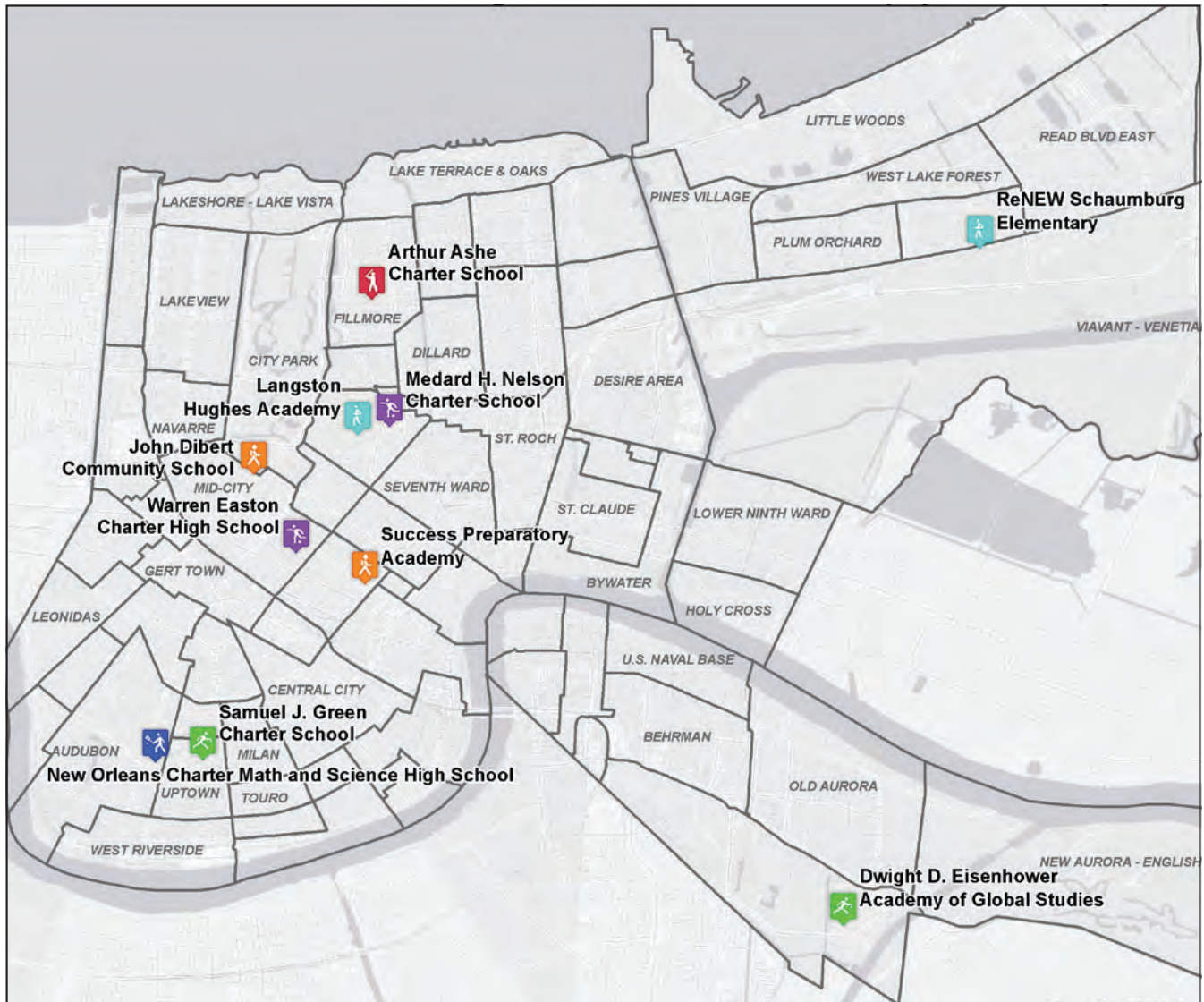
Moving forward, SHC will continue to increase the momentum it has created for Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks by offering trainings to any and all interested schools in New Orleans and providing ongoing support, as needed, to schools that have embraced the program.

SHC will currently provide support to high schools upon request, but owing to past challenges in the high school setting and successes in the elementary/middle school setting, SHC presently makes a concerted effort to recruit elementary/middle schools.

### **Bringing Instant Recess® & Other Physical Activity Breaks to Your School**

SHC offers the 45-minute training to schools at no cost. The training includes an overview of current health indicators, including obesity trends over the past two decades; discussion around challenges that exist to engaging in physical activity, specifically those that are likely to affect New Orleans youth; sample Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks; an overview of physical activity benefits, both related to health and academics; and recommendations around incorporating Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks throughout the school day. Interested schools can contact SHC at [schoolhealth@lphi.org](mailto:schoolhealth@lphi.org) for more information and to schedule a training.

# New Orleans schools using Instant Recess® and other physical activity breaks



School Health Connection has trained more than 400 school staff at 10 New Orleans schools around offering Instant Recess® and other in-class physical activity breaks.

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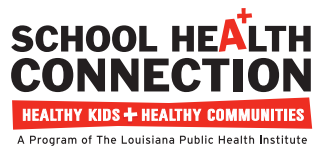
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