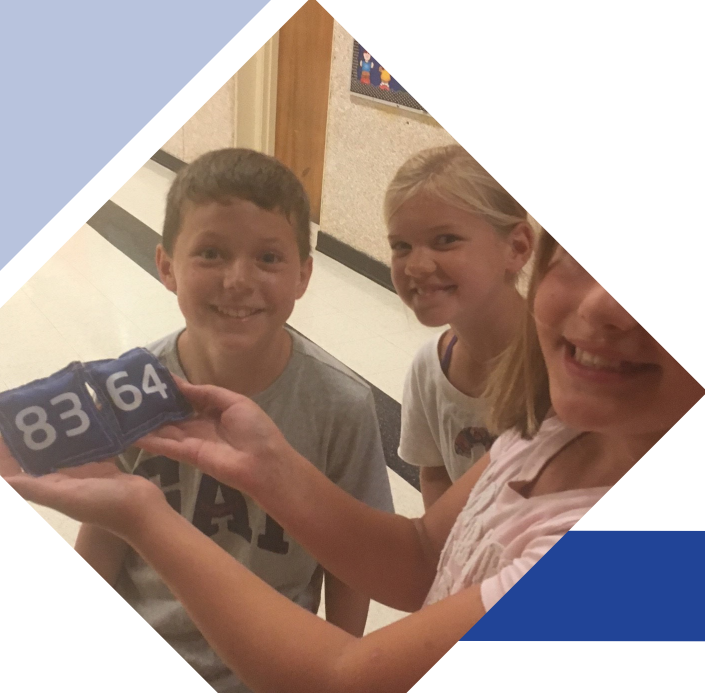




# South Shore Schools On the Move



Evaluation Results of the Nova Scotia  
Active Smarter Kids Pilot Project



September 2018 – June 2019

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Active Smarter Kids Pilot Project

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## Executive Summary

**“ASK is a better way of learning than just sitting. It’s a great way to get exercise, stay healthy, and learn at the same time!” (NS ASK Pilot Student)**

Physically active lessons (PALS) are educational lessons that “aim to incorporate physical activities with a moderate-to-vigorous intensity into the teaching of academic lesson content and do not come with the cost of academic instruction time” (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). International research has demonstrated that PALS effectively increase students’ physical activity<sup>1</sup>, while also positively affecting students’ time on task<sup>2</sup>, academic achievement<sup>3</sup>, and overall mood and sense of enjoyment of school<sup>4</sup>.

The Nova Scotia ASK Pilot Project was conceived as a way to test the feasibility of PALS as an effective way to increase physical activity within the school day for elementary school children in this province, while also contributing to student engagement with learning, and sense of belonging in school. Specifically, the NS ASK Pilot was conceived as a potential tool to help Nova Scotian teachers deliver the 50 minutes of physically active time (PAT) included in the 2015 Time to Learn Strategy.

In the 2018-19 school year, the Nova Scotia ASK Pilot was implemented in grade 5 classes at two schools within the South Shore Regional Centre for Education (SSRCE); Bluenose Academy and Newcombville Elementary. Implementation support and pilot evaluation was conducted by staff from the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg, the NS Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, and the SSRCE. The pilot and delivery model were inspired and supported by researchers at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences and was underpinned by a large physical activity intervention study called Active Smarter Kids (ASK).

The overall goal of the project was to pilot and evaluate a model and method for the incorporation of simple physical activities into delivery of academic lessons. The expected outcomes included in the project’s evaluation framework stated that ASK lessons will:

1. Contribute to student learning and engagement with lessons
2. Contribute to a sense of belonging and cooperation among students and with educators
3. Increase physical activity during class time and improve educators’ ability to meet Physical Activity Time (PAT) requirements as stated in a Time to Learn

NS ASK teachers were asked to strive to deliver 3, 30-minute ASK lessons per week, with a mind to conduct the lessons outdoors as much as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> (Dunn, Venturanza, Walsh, & Nonas, 2012)

<sup>2</sup> (Riley, Lubans, Morgan, & Young, 2015)

<sup>3</sup> (Mullender-Wijnsma, et al., 2016)

<sup>4</sup> (Resaland, 2017)

The pilot evaluation results show:

- ASK teachers were able to increase their students' weekly physical activity by 42-60 minutes on average,
- teachers averaged two ASK lessons per week with the variation explained in challenges like weather or individual teacher approaches,
- ASK lessons were delivered both indoors and outdoors with most outdoor sessions being delivered in fall and spring and the indoor lessons taking place over the winter months.

ASK teachers reported:

- seeing a perceptible increase in the physical health and stamina of their students,
- witnessing an increase in student engagement in learning via an increased ability to focus and concentrate both during and after ASK lessons,
- seeing an increase in their students' motivation to attend school because of ASK lessons,
- that they understood ASK lessons to be a contributor to an inclusive learning environment in which students of all abilities were able to experience a feeling of success in their learning.

ASK students reported:

- feeling healthier as a product of ASK lessons,
- feeling that ASK lessons are a "better" and "easier" way to learn,
- feeling more "ready to learn" following ASK lessons,
- feeling more motivated to learn, and
- feeling excited to come to school on the days when they had ASK lessons.

ASK teachers' attempts to meet the project's objective were challenged by inclement weather, scheduled-school events, and school closures. Despite these challenges, all NS ASK teachers described ASK lessons as an engaging and effective model for reviewing curriculum outcomes that provided both students and themselves with an increased sense of enjoyment of the school day.

ASK physically active lessons are a promising best practice with the potential to help increase the physical, social and emotional health of Nova Scotian students, while helping teachers meet the physical activity policy requirements set out in the Time to Learn Strategy.

As such, PALS will be further developed and evaluated in phase 2 of the NS ASK Pilot during the 2019-2020 school year. This is an expanded version of the pilot that includes classes in grades 4-6 at 6 schools located within the SSRCE. This expanded pilot is funded by the Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, the NS Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Nova Scotia Health Authority, the South Shore Regional Centre for Education, and the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg.

Following the end of the 2019-2020 school year, learnings from the expanded pilot will be shared and recommendations made for the sustainable expansion of ASK lessons within the province of Nova Scotia.

## Introduction

Between September 2018 and June 2019, the Nova Scotia Active Smarter Kids (ASK) Pilot Project was delivered in three grade 5 classes in the South Shore Regional Centre for Education (SSRCE). The ASK pilot's primary goal was to incorporate three 30-minute Physically Active Lessons (PALS) into the weekly timetables for grade 5 classes at Bluenose Academy and Newcombville Elementary School. Physically active lessons have been defined as educational lessons that "aim to incorporate physical activities with a moderate-to-vigorous intensity into the teaching of academic lesson content and do not come with the cost of academic instruction time" (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). Put another way, ASK is a model for curriculum delivery that involves the incorporation of simple low-cost physical activities into the delivery of academic lessons.

The genesis of bringing ASK to Nova Scotia came from the "Education on the Move: Ideas and Inspiration for School-Based Physical Activity"<sup>5</sup> report written by Britt Vegsund who travelled to Norway to investigate how physical activity was integrated in Norwegian school days. "Education on the Move" offers a full background of the concept and rationale for piloting this approach in Nova Scotia schools. Together, given the positive results of international studies of physically active lessons, along with the NS Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's requirement for Physically Active Time and its goals around Excellence in Teaching and Leadership and Student Success Planning, ASK is both a timely and well-suited intervention to pilot in Nova Scotia. This report will provide an overview and share evaluation results of the NS ASK Pilot.

Physically Active Lessons (PALS) are a part of a growing international movement to increase physical activity within school days. The need for school-based health and physical activity interventions in Nova Scotia is clear. From the 2018 ParticipACTION Report Card only 35% of Canadian children aged 5-17 meeting the physical activity guidelines set by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP) (ParticipACTION, 2018). The 2005 PACY Report demonstrates that Nova Scotia children's levels of physical activity drop off as they age. While over 96% of grade 3 children of both sexes were able to attain the guidelines of 60 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous daily physical activity, only 45.3% of grade 7 boys and 23.8% of grade 7 girls were able to do so. Grade 11 students fared much worse with only 9.7% of boys and less than 1% of girls being active enough to achieve the moderate physical activity recommendation (Campagna, 2005).

While the initial motivation for the Norwegian model was to increase physical activity early academic research demonstrated that the benefits of ASK went beyond physical activity into the realm of on-task behaviour, cooperation among students, and enhanced learning and engagement with curriculum. Notably, in 2015 the Department of Education in Nova Scotia set a requirement that elementary school children are required to receive 50 minutes of Physically Active Time (PAT) per week outside of physical education classes. Specific resources have not yet been created to support PAT. The PAT requirement along with the Nova Scotian physical activity statistics helped inform the decision to pilot ASK lessons in the later grades of elementary school. The ASK project is understood to have the potential to contribute to the physical, social, and cognitive wellbeing of Nova Scotian students. It is also conceived to support PAT as well as other goals related to quality instruction and Student Success Planning in Nova Scotia.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://southshoreconnect.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Education-on-the-Move.pdf>

The growing international body of research literature on physical activity promotion within schools, the benefits of physically active lessons are well-documented. Intervention studies using accelerometers and pedometers to measure students' physical activity during PALS have demonstrated an increase in intervention class students' physical activity (Dunn, Venturanza, Walsh, & Nonas, 2012).

PALS have also been shown to increase students' time on task. Time on task is a key indicator of academic success and is defined as "time spent actually engaging in academic learning, not simply time spent 'behaving'" (Riley, Lubans, Morgan, & Young, 2015).

Furthermore, PALS have been shown to contribute positively to children's academic achievement. Recently, a "two-year longitudinal study demonstrated that pupils who engaged in physically active lessons were four months ahead in maths and spelling than their peers who only engaged in traditional classroom learning" (Mullender-Wijnsma, et al., 2016). In fact, in 2010, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention specifically recommended that physical activity be integrated into academic lessons "because movement has been found to enhance learning while also improving students' physical activity levels" (Martin & Murtagh, 2017).

Finally, schools that have provided ASK physically active lessons have reported improvements in students' overall mood (Resaland, 2017) and increases in students' willingness to cooperate and collaborate (Vegsund, 2018).

#### Collaborators

This project is a collaboration involving staff from the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg, the NS Department of Communities, Culture, and Heritage, the South Shore Regional Centre for Education, the Nova Scotia Health Authority, and the Health Promoting Schools partnership. Since its inception this project has been supported and informed by researchers at the Western Norwegian University of Applied Sciences. The implementation and administration of the pilot was primarily undertaken by Britt Vegsund in her position as the Municipal Physical Activity Leader (MPAL) for the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg.

## Overview of the NS ASK Pilot Project

**Overall goal:** To pilot and evaluate a model and method for the incorporation of simple physical activities into delivery of academic lessons.

#### **Expected outcomes:**

1. Increase physical activity during class time and improve educators' ability to meet Physical Activity Time (PAT) requirements as stated in a Time to Learn
2. Contribute to a sense of belonging and cooperation among students and with educators
3. Contribute to student learning and engagement with lessons

## NS ASK Pilot Implementation

### School Selection

The two schools that participated in the NS ASK Pilot were selected in the spring of 2018 based on their willingness to participate and a state of readiness as established by each school's participation in other health-promoting initiatives. The schools were also selected because of their diverse geographic locations within the South Shore Regional Centre for Education (SSRCE), and the fact that one school (Newcombville Elementary) is located in a rural community, and one is located within town (Bluenose Academy).

### Timeframe

Originally, the plan was to run the pilot until the end of the school term in December. However, by November, it was clear to both the administrative and teaching teams that the positive outcomes of the ASK project warranted continuing the project until the end of the school year. School administrators at each school were in agreement. The implementation schedule is included in Appendix A.

### Training

The NS ASK Pilot Project teachers received professional development in physically active lessons and the ASK approach in June and September of 2018. This included an introduction to the project's evaluation framework and teaching resources. Teachers began teaching ASK lessons during the first week of the school year and endeavoured to include three 30-minute ASK lessons within their weekly timetable.

### Settings

PALS took place primarily in the schoolyard. When weather conditions did not permit, physically active lessons occurred indoors. While the teachers involved in the NS ASK Pilot preferred teaching their physically active lessons outdoors, they utilized their school's gymnasiums, hallways and other available rooms when necessary.

### Data Collection

The ASK teachers completed a weekly spreadsheet, called the ASK Teacher Log, in which they documented each ASK lesson that they delivered. Information collected in the ASK Teacher Log included the length of time of each lesson, the subject taught, the location of the lesson, and the level of intensity of the physical activity incorporated into the ASK lesson. Teachers could also input any observations that they made about the lesson. The ASK Teacher Logs and other supporting resource documents were shared on a Google Drive that project collaborators from both the administrative and teaching teams could access throughout the project.

### ASK Collaborative Learning Teams

With the support of the Health Promoting Schools Partnership, NS ASK Pilot Project teachers were permitted to attend dedicated ASK Collaborative Learning Time (CLT) meetings for the duration of the 2018-2019 school year. Two members of the ASK Administrative team joined these meetings. The purpose of these CLTs was to share ASK lesson ideas, learnings, and collect evaluation data. The meetings were highly productive, and the in-person approach kept all collaborators engaged and committed to the NS ASK Pilot Project.



## Evaluation Overview

A mixed methods design was used to collect and gather data on the NS ASK Pilot. Following the framework of Concurrent Triangulation Design (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003), both quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently throughout the project. The quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately and then compared, allowing for the cross-validation of findings.

The process evaluation framework focused on the implementation of the NS ASK Pilot. Process evaluation data was collected through student experience surveys, mid-term focus groups with ASK students, regularly scheduled focus groups with ASK teachers held during ASK CLT meetings, and an ASK lesson tracking spreadsheet called the ASK Teacher Log that teachers completed weekly.

The outcome evaluation framework focused on the contribution to results of ASK lessons and sought to glean insight into the effects that ASK lessons had on both teacher and student experiences of physical activity, engagement in learning, and school days. Data collection methods for the outcome evaluation framework included focus groups with ASK students and teachers, student experience surveys, and an ASK student assignment to create a promotional poster for ASK lessons to highlight what is important to individual students about their experience with ASK lessons.

This report will present findings from both the process and outcome evaluation of the NS ASK Pilot. Overall, these findings demonstrate that physically active lessons, as introduced through the NS ASK Pilot had positive effects on teacher and student experiences of school, increased students' weekly physical activity levels, and contributed to students' learning outcomes. The report will conclude with learnings that will be incorporated into year two implementation and evaluation.

### Limitation of the Evaluation

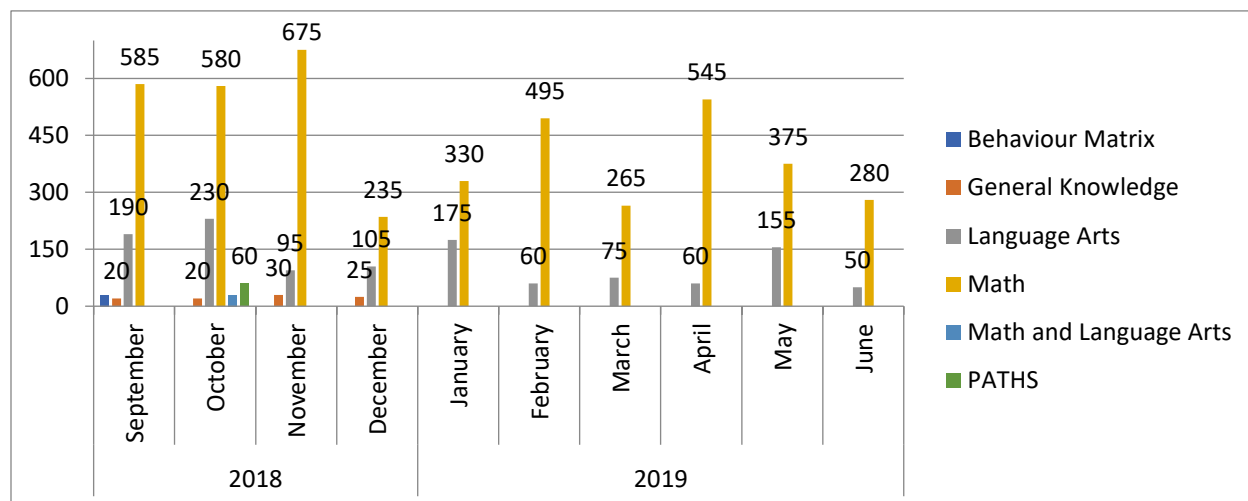
While this report and its findings offer validation that implementation of ASK in Nova Scotia can deliver similar results to our Norwegian counterparts, it is important to note that the all components of the pilot implementation model will not be replicated in a broader roll out. As such, further evaluation and attention is required to assess results based on a roll out model that is both sustainable and context driven.

## Evaluation Results: Process Evaluation

The NS ASK Teacher Logs that teachers filled out weekly throughout the pilot collected data on the following areas: the location and length of ASK lessons, the number of students who participated in each ASK lesson, the length of time of each ASK lesson, the level of intensity of the physical activity included in each lesson, and the academic subject included in each ASK lesson.

The data collected via the teacher logs from September 2018 to June 2019 provide valuable insight into what was happening on the ground at both NS ASK schools. The following section presents a snapshot of the academic subjects incorporated into ASK lessons, the number of ASK lessons that were taught weekly by the three teachers, and the location of the lessons. They include data collected from all three of the ASK classes (two at Bluenose Academy, one at Newcombville Elementary).

## Academic Content



**Table 1: Number of minutes spent delivering academic subjects through ASK Lessons**

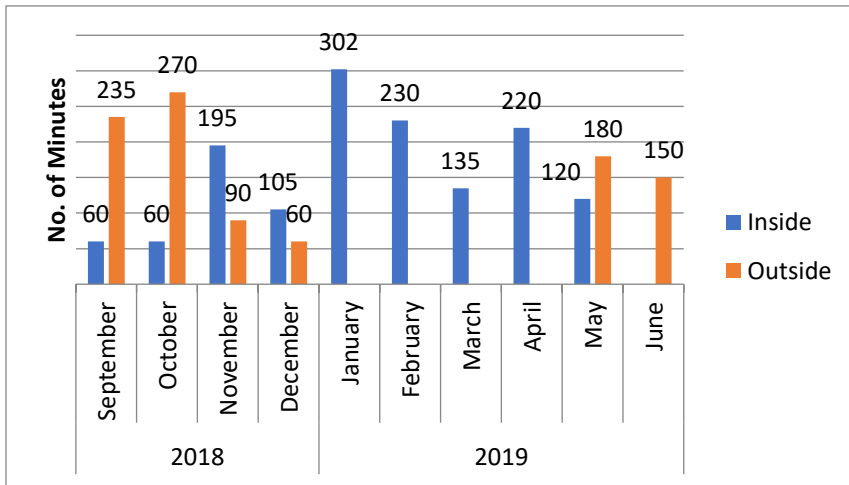
The ASK Teacher log data shows that the academic subject most incorporated by ASK teachers into physically active lessons was mathematics. This is consistent with the research around physically active lessons in various international contexts. According to ASK Teacher 1 at Bluenose Academy, physically active lessons are:

“... good for re-visiting curriculum outcomes in math ... Imagine I give the kids a worksheet on multiplication facts, or we go outside and do 20 minutes of dodgeball. You know which one they are enjoying more. It’s really easy because they say it constantly. And even the Wheel of Fun and all that, they prefer that when doing multiplication. Because we’re really into multiplication facts. And they prefer that to “here is a worksheet”. And even, we’ve got a lot of games indoors, but it’s merging it with that and other things. And for me it’s for those hands-on learners who really enjoy this part. The kinesthetic learners are totally about it.”

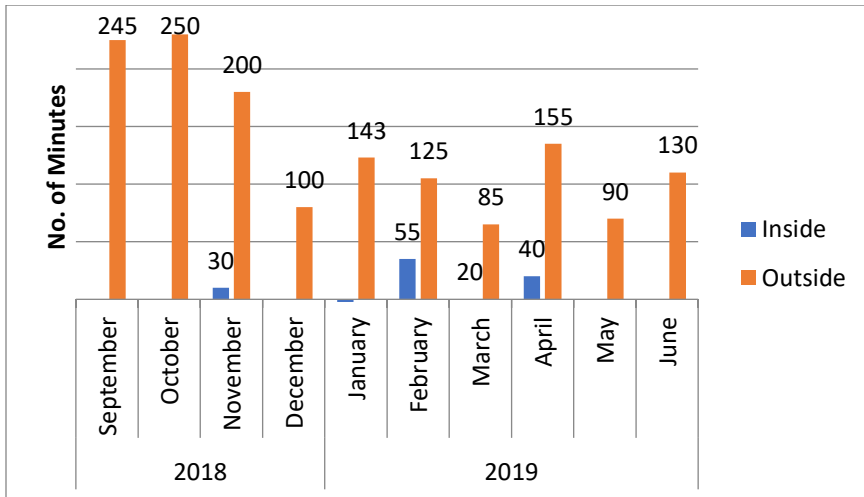
## Time (minutes) spent in ASK Lessons and Location

Tables 2-4 show the total number of minutes that each of the 3 ASK classes spent in ASK lessons per month between September 2018 and June 2019. The tables differentiate between indoor and outdoor lessons. The tables demonstrate that during the fall semester the average number of minutes per month that each class spent in ASK lessons is 242 minutes, or 4 hours. This corresponds with the teachers reporting during mid-term focus groups that they managed to teach an average of 2, 30-minute ASK lessons per week. Teacher’s attempts to meet the NS ASK Pilot goal of 3, 30-minutes lessons were

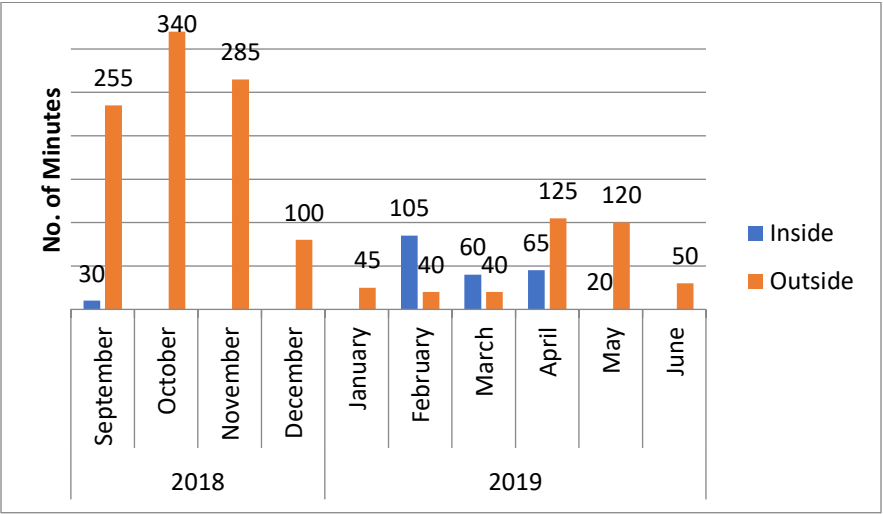
impacted by scheduled school events, such as assemblies and class photos, as well as inclement weather.



**Table 2: Newcombsville Elementary**



**Table 3: Bluenose Academy, class 1**



**Table 4: Bluenose Academy, class 2**

These tables also demonstrate a general reduction in the delivery of ASK lessons during the second semester, with winter weather infringing on the delivery of outdoor ASK lessons. During ASK CLT meetings held during the winter months, all three teachers reported feeling constrained in their ability to take lessons outdoors because of the hazards of running on ice and in sub-zero temperatures.

Overall, the variation in the three different tables above demonstrates that the successful delivery of ASK lessons is highly contingent on individual teacher’s approaches. However, these tables also demonstrate a considerable amount of student time spent being physically active within instructional time. As such, ASK physically active lessons represent a very promising best practice for helping Nova Scotian teachers deliver the stated PAT goal of fifty minutes per week.

Of interest is the difference in the amount of blue between Table 2 depicting Newcombville Elementary school and Tables 3 and 4 portraying the two classes at Bluenose Academy. At the beginning of the school year, the principal of Newcombville made a deliberate decision to ensure that the grade 5 class had regular access to the gymnasium for the purposes of ASK lessons. In comparison to the two classes at Bluenose Academy, the ASK teacher at Newcombville relied on the use of the gym. This triangulates with data collected during the ASK teacher experience focus groups, in which the ASK teacher from Newcombville reported using the gym during wet and cold weather. During the months of January to April he relied solely on the gym for teaching ASK lessons. Table 2 demonstrates how having sanctioned access to indoor space for ASK lessons increased the amount of time that students were able to spend in physically active lessons. For example, the students in both classes at Bluenose Academy spent 100 minutes engaged in ASK lessons for the month of December, while the students at Newcombville Elementary spent 165 minutes.

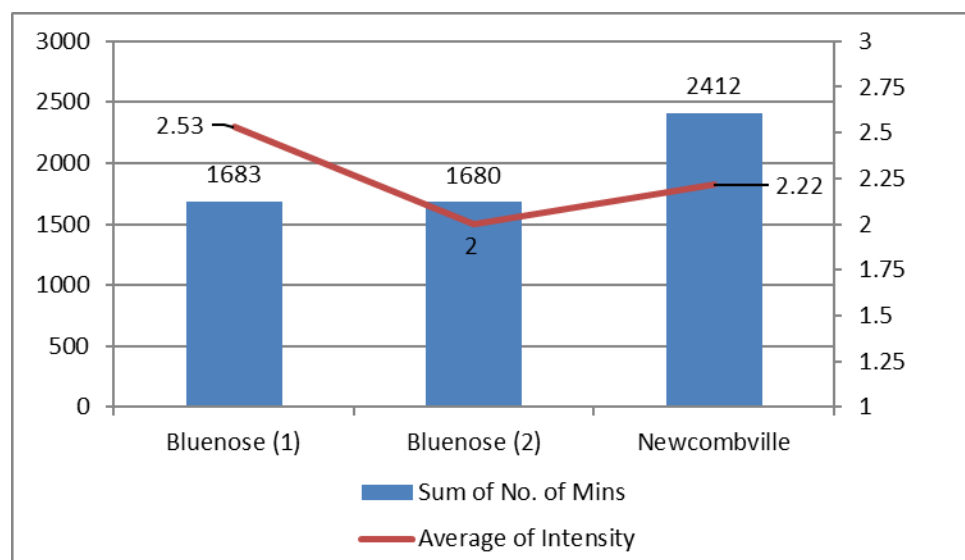
### Evaluation Results: Outcome Evaluation

The following sections explore the manner in which ASK physically active lessons affected change for students and teachers in the following outcome areas: physical activity within instructional time,

student learning and engagement with lessons, and student sense of belonging and cooperation among students and teachers.

### Expected Outcome 1: Increase physical activity during class time

The following table (Table 5) presents a comprehensive look at the impact that PALS have had on the amount of physical activity completed by students in the NS ASK Pilot. The blue bars demonstrate the total amount of physical activity accomplished by each of the three ASK classes between September 2018 and June 2019. The orange line depicts the average level of intensity of the physical activity expended by the students during their lessons. In the ASK Teacher Logs, teachers were asked to rate the level of intensity of the physical activity included in each ASK lesson. One equals low intensity physical activity such as walking, 2 equals medium intensity such as brisk walking, and 3 equals high intensity such as jogging and running<sup>6</sup>.



**Table 5: Total number of minutes spent in ASK lessons per class and intensity of PA (September 2018 to June 2019)**

When considering Table 5 it is important to remember that the physical activity completed by students depicted here is in addition to physical education class, recess and extra-curricular activities. Because of dedicated access to the gymnasium, ASK students at Newcombville Elementary received more physical activity within ASK lessons than their counterparts at Bluenose Academy.

With the level of intensity of physical activity averaging 2, this table demonstrates that ASK students received a considerable amount of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) within instructional time. Over the course of the school year, at a minimum, ASK students completed 28 hours of MVPA within class time. The students in the class (Newcombville) that completed the most ASK lessons completed 40 hours of additional physical activity within class time. Divided amongst instructional weeks, this represents an average of 60.3 minutes of MVPA per week. Even the two classes that provided less ASK lessons were able to achieve an average of 42 minutes per week of MVPA for students. This table is a graphic representation of how ASK lessons can help Nova Scotian children

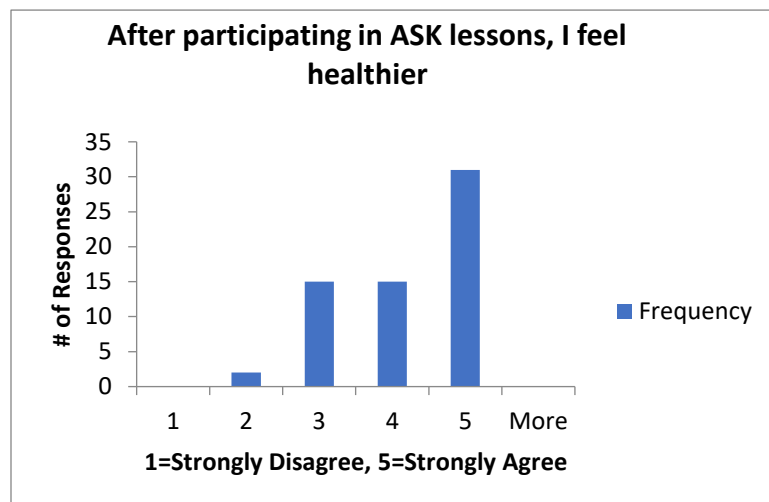
<sup>6</sup> This level of intensity scale was provided by ASK researchers at the Western Norwegian University of Applied Sciences.

achieve the guidelines of the CSEP Physical Activity Guidelines for children and youth, and how Nova Scotian teachers can fulfill PAT guidelines within instructional time.

#### Range of Benefits of PALs: Feeling Healthier

The three ASK teachers reported seeing an increase in the physical health of their students during the NS ASK Pilot. In focus groups they described their students as being more “fit” and having more physical stamina to run and participate in physically active lessons. For example, Teacher 1 at Bluenose Academy reported the following: “Mine have increased stamina, physically. Like I saw it go from students who would complain about doing a tiny bit of running to having the ability to do more. And also, hand-eye coordination, there’s more coordination coming with some of my students. That’s a visible difference”.

The ASK Students also reported feeling healthier as a product of their physically active lessons. The following table is taken from the student experience survey that was administered to all ASK students in December 2018. In the survey students were asked to evaluate a series of statements about their experiences with ASK lessons. The survey utilized a 5-point Likert scale in which 1 equaled strongly disagree and 5 equalled strongly agree. It shows that the majority of ASK students strongly agreed (37 of 63 total responses) or agreed (18 of 63 total responses) that they felt healthier after participating in ASK lessons.



**Table 6: Results from ASK student experience survey**

There are many examples of students reporting that they felt healthier because of ASK lessons. The following three responses came in succession from three different students at Bluenose Academy to the question, “Do you feel healthier now that you are doing ASK lessons regularly?”

Student 1 – “Well, I am getting faster at running.”

Student 2– “My brain feels healthier.”

Student 3 – “It encouraged me to go to basketball.”

These three responses offer insight into the fact that not only did students report feeling healthier because of their ASK lessons, but that they understood there to be a broad range of definitions of

health, and that in the case of the last example, that the healthy behaviour they learned in their ASK lessons translated to an interest in other physically active pursuits.



“I just ran a kilometer! In math class!”

(NS ASK Student)

## Expected Outcome 2: Contribute to student learning and engagement with lessons

Data collected through the student experience survey and focus groups with both students and teachers demonstrated the positive effects that ASK lessons had on the following areas related to student learning and engagement with lessons; motivation to learn, and the ability to focus and concentrate both during and after ASK lessons.

### Motivation to Learn

Motivation to learn arose as a theme in student focus group conversations about ASK lessons. For one student at Newcombsville Elementary, the drastic difference between the fun and active method of ASK lessons and classroom-based teaching approaches provided the motivation that he needed to actively engage in his learning:

ASK Student: "I find it fun because instead of sitting in a desk and the teacher telling you a bunch of boring stuff, and forcing it into your brain, you get to go outside and learn it. Actually learn it."

Interviewer: "How do you think it helps you learn, when you're outside and running around?"

ASK Student: "Because you want to get the question done so you can do more of the tag or dodgeball."

Interviewer: "Cool. So, you have a bit of motivation to do your work?"

ASK Student: "Yes".

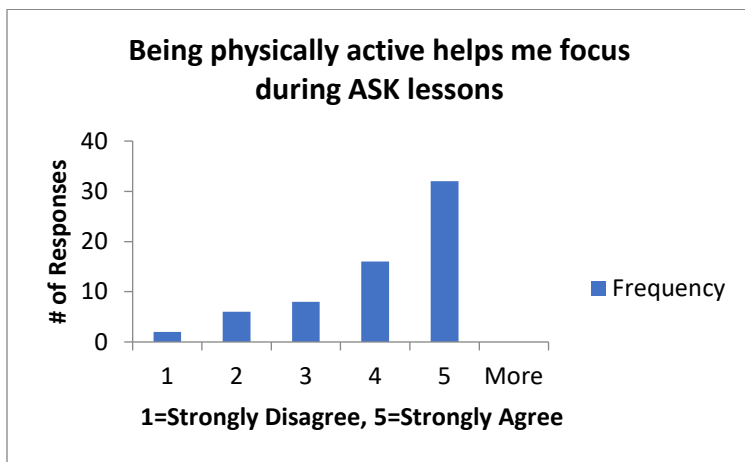
### Increased Student Focus and Concentration

ASK teachers and students reported witnessing an increase in students' ability to focus and concentrate on academic content both during ASK lessons, and once they returned to the classroom. For example, Teacher 2 at Bluenose Academy reported:

I've noticed they've been able to do things for a little bit longer. Even in the cold. You would think that they'd be complaining, but they really don't. They really want to be out there and do it, and so with that I find that they have increased their focus. Like the focus on the lesson has become more even.

Results from the ASK student experience survey demonstrated that most ASK students felt that being physically active during their lessons helped them focus on their learning.





**Table 7: Results from ASK student experience survey**

For one student at Newcombsville Elementary, “ASK is fun because you get to play outside and have fun and fresh air. Like I breathe fresh air and it helps with my mind. It helps me focus more. It gets in my mind and then it helps me focus more because when I’m inside and I try to do times table questions it’s really hard. But when I’m outside it’s just easy.”

Many students used the words “easier” and “better” to describe their learning process through physically active lessons. During student experience focus groups, responses like the following were common:

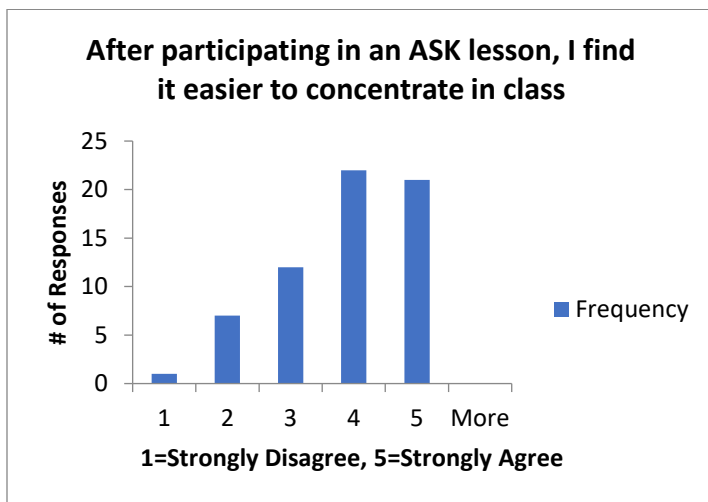
When you’re doing the math it’s like, it [ASK] kind of makes it easier. The running and to not have all that energy in class. And when I have more energy, it’s kind of hard to think of the answer. When you’re outside it’s funner [sic]. It’s easier to be able to answer the questions. (ASK Student).

Another student described how she was able to find her answers “more quickly” during ASK lessons.

A poster created by ASK students in the ASK promotional poster project highlights the element of ease and enjoyment experienced by many students. In the poster, the student wrote: “ASK is really fun, you should try it. I find it a lot easier to learn”.

ASK students also reported feeling that being active during their ASK lessons helped them concentrate on their lessons once they returned to their classroom. During focus groups, many students described this as a sensation of getting their “energy out” so that they could settle and focus when they returned inside. A student from Bluenose Academy shared this reflection: “When you go outside you get a lot of your energy out so that when you come back inside, you’re ready to learn most times”.

The following table (Table 8) demonstrates the majority of ASK students agreed (r =21) or strongly agreed (r=19) that they were more able to concentrate following an ASK lesson.



**Table 8: Results from ASK student experience survey**

The three ASK teachers reported seeing the same increase in their students’ ability to concentrate in class following an ASK lesson. The teachers used similar language to describe a perceptible drop in students’ energy levels following ASK lessons. This translated to better student behavior, more focus, the ability to stick to academic tasks with better endurance, and the collective sense of time passing quickly for both students and teachers.

An ASK teacher at Bluenose Academy described this phenomenon this way:

I always think that they’re a lot more focused when they come back into class, they’ve used up some of their energy, so there’s less chat and all of that. Because we do have a two-hour piece between 1015 and 1215. And I used to find, last year with a different group, that was the longest part of the day. It was so painful. And now with ASK in there, it doesn’t seem to drag. The students aren’t as sluggish halfway through that two-hour period. (ASK Teacher 2)

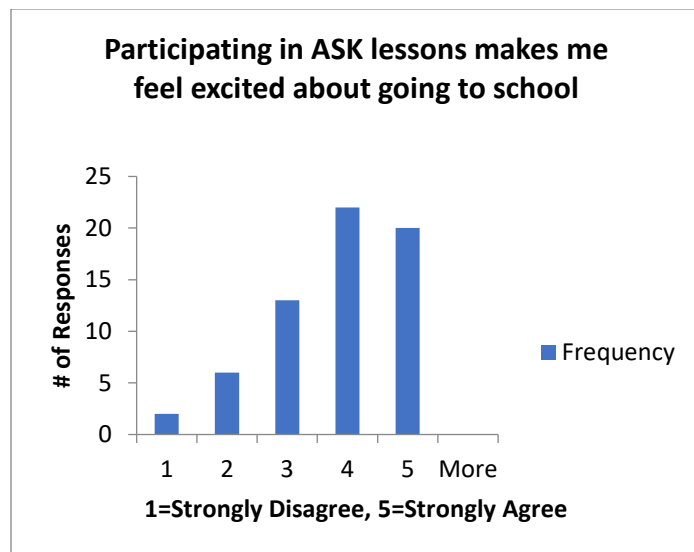
These observations were matched by the second ASK teacher at Bluenose Academy:

The stamina in the class. One day, you know they got working on something, and then the next thing, all of a sudden, someone says, “Well what time is it?” and I say, “Well we’re going to lunch in about 5 minutes.” And they were like, “WHAT??” I mean they couldn’t believe it. So, ASK gives them an opportunity for whatever activity was going on to be a little bit more focused and to really have a longer time period to work with endurance. (ASK Teacher 1)

### Outcome 3: Contribute to a sense of belonging and cooperation among students and with teachers

Evaluation results demonstrate that ASK lessons contributed positively to students’ sense of belonging at school. In order to investigate this with students, the evaluation team used language familiar to students. Focus group questions focused on whether students felt happier and excited about coming to school as a product of ASK lessons.

In the ASK student experience survey 19 (of 63) strongly agreed and 24 (of 63) agreed and that participating in ASK lessons makes them feel excited about attending school (see Table 10).



**Table 9: Results from ASK student experience survey**

This quantitative data is supported by the following reflection from an ASK student at Newcombville Elementary:

Now I like school more because when I get up in the morning I want to go to school. And when I have a stuffy nose my mom says to me “stay home”. And I say, “no I don’t want to, I want to go to school because the ASK program and I like school. So, the ASK program just makes school that much better. (ASK Student)

The three ASK teachers observed this increased sense of motivation to come to school in their students. The following conversation occurred during a focus group with the three ASK teachers:

ASK Teacher 1: “I think they totally love the fact that when they come to school, they get to do ASK lessons. So, I think that is a motivator.”

ASK Teacher 2: “They’re engaged at school. So, they come to school.”

ASK Teacher 1: “And they share it with their parents, they share it with other kids in their class, and so they feel good about that. I think it makes them look forward to coming to school.”

ASK Teacher 2: “And I think the attendance for some students in this class has increased this year from last year. That could be a part of because they have fun and they’re engaged.”

Responses like this were common in both the teacher and student experience focus groups and bode well for the potential of ASK lessons contributing to the promotion of student attendance and increases students’ sense of belonging in school.

### Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment

The playful and cooperative format of ASK lessons allowed the teachers to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for their students. In the following quotation, a teacher from Bluenose Academy describes how the students who were working with regular curriculum and those who were working with Individual Programme Plans (IPPs) were able to work alongside each other, without singling out the students who required an for working with different curriculum areas. This created a sense of mastery and success amongst all students:

I think they feel really safe and are encouraged to do it. And it becomes about the outcomes too and they feel quite good about themselves too because they don't realize that we're differentiating the game sometimes. They just see, 'I'm succeeding'. They're feeling good academically. (ASK Teacher 2)

Furthermore, NS ASK teachers reported that they found the format of ASK lessons beneficial for students who suffered from anxiety related to academic performance. Students who were more likely to experience anxiety while trying to find an answer in front of their class, were much more relaxed while answering a question in the middle of an ASK lesson. This phenomenon could be related to the playful nature of ASK lessons, but also the fact that the student didn't feel the pressure of having a room full of students watching them as they worked to find their answer.



“When you go outside you get a lot of your energy out so that when you come back inside, you're ready to learn most times”

(NS ASK Student)

### Range of Benefits of PALS: Enjoyment of class time for students and teachers

At the end of the pilot school year all ASK teachers reported that they planned to continue with ASK physically active lessons in future years. For the teachers, the benefits to their teaching practice and classroom dynamics were sufficient to outweigh any of the challenges that they faced in incorporating ASK lessons into their weekly timetables. The teachers also reported that throughout the school year, their students demanded ASK lessons on a regular basis, and that, if it were up to the them, the students wouldn't let them stop teaching this way.

After having spent the school year observing and evaluating ASK lessons in action, it's clear that it's the fun and engaging nature of physically active lessons that provides the impetus for teachers to continue teaching ASK lessons, despite the challenges they faced in implementing physically active lessons. As a teacher from Bluenose Academy declared during a regularly-scheduled evaluation meeting, "It's [ASK] brought some of the joy back to teaching math."

## Unexpected Outcomes

The following sections include discussion of two outcomes of the ASK pilot that were not included in the project's original evaluation framework: ASK as a tool for teaching and learning social emotional curriculum, and ASK as a tool for formative assessment. The three of the ASK teachers were strong in their convictions about the positive change that ASK lessons affected in these areas. As such, these unexpected outcomes warrant further investigation.

### Learning through Challenge: The Social-Emotional Landscape of Physically Active Lessons

The collaborative and active nature of ASK lessons provided students with a chance to explore the more challenging aspects of interpersonal relationships. Students reported feeling frustrated when a teammate did not pull their weight in an activity or let their team down in some other way. The flipside of this, is that ASK lessons provided students with experiential learning in the domain of social-emotional learning.

One of the social-emotional skills that the students learned through their ASK lessons was collaborating and working as a team. According to one teacher:

With ASK they're learning to be good learners and good losers. At first, we did have that in-your-face kind of attitude, so we've had to do work around that. Working at fair play. With ASK it's a great time to teach it when you're in the moment. (ASK Teacher 2)

Through ASK the students were given an opportunity to work through interpersonal challenges and collectively seek solutions to the problems that arose during their physically active lessons. According to the ASK teachers, this often took the form of class debriefing sessions that would follow particularly challenging ASK lessons. The debriefing of ASK lessons offered students the opportunity to air their frustrations and concerns in a supportive environment and work together to address the root cause. They also worked together to develop solutions to ensure that the activities would run more smoothly in future ASK lessons. When asked if she felt that ASK physically active lessons had helped her create a safe and inclusive learning environment for her students, a teacher at Bluenose Academy highlighted the benefits of ASK lessons for social-emotional learning:

It goes back to all that social-emotional, because you're teaching so much of that social-emotional curriculum. You're creating an environment where they feel, like I have got some students who are much slower and less coordinated than others, but they're out there participating just as much because it is a safe environment. I think even more so than gym, because gym can really focus on the competitive side. But this is just, "I'm learning math. I'm going to go for it". (ASK Teacher 2)

This social-emotional learning was the largest challenge faced by students during their ASK lessons; the sometimes-difficult task of working together in a learning environment that fosters collaboration and communication. Paradoxically, within this greatest challenge lies an unexpected benefit of ASK as well.

### ASK Lessons as a Formative Assessment Tool

The three NS ASK teachers reported that they found ASK lessons to be an effective tool for conducting assessments of their students' understandings of certain concepts. One key benefit to the active and fun nature of ASK lessons is that most students were keen to participate in the lesson. While engaged in an activity in which one needs to answer a question with a teacher in order to return to the game, a student cannot shy away from providing an answer. According to ASK Teacher 3:

It's harder to hide in ASK lessons. They sit in the classroom and the student doesn't know the answer, and you're going around the room. But if you're outside and they're participating in the game, you're going to know pretty quickly if they don't know the concept that you're working on.

The two other NS ASK teachers reported similar findings: "As a quick assessment, ASK is awesome. I can come in straight away and say, 'those 3 have really not got it'. So, I really find it powerful as a quick assessment" (ASK Teacher 2).

### The Challenges of ASK Lessons

This section focuses on the main challenges that ASK teachers faced in implementing ASK physically active lessons. These challenges were logistical in nature, and for the most part, all three teachers were able to find solutions to overcome them.

#### Weather

Poor weather, particularly winter ice and sub-zero wind chill presented a large challenge to all three ASK teachers during the pilot project. The icy conditions that predominated the winter of 2019 made running outdoors hazardous. These conditions sometimes made it difficult for the teachers to plan lessons, as the schoolyard conditions were sometimes not amenable to what they had planned. "You can have an activity planned and by the time you get outside you say, 'oh, it's too icy over here, you can't run today'. And I have to think of something else to do."



"ASK is amazing. I actually look forward to going to school!"

(NS ASK Student)

Despite plenty of instructions on how to dress for outdoor activities, offers on behalf of the ASK team to provide winter clothing for families impacted by financial barriers, and urging from the teachers, students often did not come to school dressed appropriately for winter weather. This presented a large challenge for teaching outdoors. In the autumn and spring, students reported that the running that they did during their ASK lessons helped warm them up, but in the winter the extremely cold temperatures sometimes kept ASK lessons indoors. After all, a sweatshirt is not adequate protection from sub-zero centigrade wind chills. Arguably, this seemingly, culturally ingrained practice of inadequate dressing for outdoor conditions may be toughest challenge to overcome in efforts to incorporate outdoor lessons into school timetables for students in Nova Scotia.

Students' inadequate clothing sometimes shut down the possibilities for fun physically active lessons. An ASK teacher explained this, "Once we went out and I wanted them to go down the slide as a part of the lesson. But, being grade fives, no matter how many times you say, 'we're going out', or 'we're going out after recess', most of them don't have snow pants or anything. So, they couldn't because the slide was still damp." (ASK Teacher 2)

### Time Constraints

Furthermore, winter weather that led to school cancellations sometimes interfered with the delivery of ASK lessons. When school weeks were shortened due to snow days, teachers had a difficult time fitting ASK lessons in among their other teaching priorities. "Look at this week" said an ASK teacher during a focus group. "Monday was a snow day. Tuesday, they didn't put the kids out because the wind chill was too low, and so we're down to two days. Hopefully we'll get one ASK lesson in this week" (ASK Teacher 1). Other school events and activities such as assemblies and school photographs sometimes interfered with the ASK teachers' ability to deliver the project's goal of 3 ASK lessons per week.

Because ASK lessons contain the delivery of academic material, ASK teachers were able to include them as instructional time in their weekly schedule. However, it was challenging for the ASK teachers to keep on top of meeting all their curriculum outcomes. One teacher explained how she took the 30 minutes per day for her ASK lessons from her 90-minute daily math allocation:

Because I take that 30 minutes out of my 90-minute math slot and I'm just a couple of weeks behind where I should be with my curriculum outcomes, but that happens every year to a degree too. And yes, sometimes it's great because we're reviewing things that are easy to do outside, but you sometimes then need the time to get to the deeper stuff which you cannot do in a game outside. Like it's paid off with the increase in physical activity and they know their basic facts really well. But then I am a little behind in some things. (ASK Teacher 2)

While the focus on the review of academic material positively benefited ASK students in that it helped reinforce their learning in key areas, this teacher was challenged to keep on top of all the curriculum outcomes that she was required to deliver in all other areas. However, she did clarify that this is not a phenomenon specific to ASK, but more of a perennial challenge of teaching in general.

### Innovation

Finally, a challenge faced by the ASK teachers was coming up with new ASK lesson ideas. During a focus group, one even mused that this kept her up at night. For the pilot project, ASK teachers were provided with 10 sample ASK lesson ideas, provided by colleagues in Norway. The teachers were required to

create and deliver their own physically active lessons, using the curricula they were working with. This created extra work for these teachers, which clearly caused some distress. However, the following quotation from an ASK teacher demonstrates that the benefits experienced by both ASK teachers and students were sufficient to outweigh the burden of this extra work:

Well, some of the sleepless nights thinking of games (laughter) have impacted me negatively. But that's all teaching. You don't sleep much some nights. I've found that, because we're the pilot group, trying to come up with ideas and get your head around it; it's always harder. So, at the beginning it felt like it was another big thing on our shoulders and "oh my gosh" and so, there is always that with a pilot programme. But as I said, going outside, I really enjoy that part and I'm also loving the quick assessment that it gives me, and seeing the children become more physically active, more coordinated, all those things. So, there's lot of positives, it's just part of being a pilot programme. (ASK teacher 2)

It is important to note that the NS ASK Pilot Project teachers created a wide range of ASK lessons featuring Nova Scotia curricula that will be used in the future by other teachers who engage in ASK physically active lessons.

## Learnings for Future Implementation of ASK Lessons

The three NS ASK Pilot Project teachers worked very diligently and with flexibility to deliver physically active lessons each week. This section will explore some of the practices and strategies that they employed to mitigate the challenges of teaching physically active lessons.

### Maintaining a flexible mindset

The weather and other scheduled school activities did not always cooperate with scheduled ASK lessons. As opposed to holding a very strict weekly schedule for ASK lessons, the three ASK Pilot Project teachers found that being flexible about when and where they taught ASK lessons helped them incorporate ASK lessons into their weekly timetables. They each reported sometimes using hallway space to conduct ASK lessons when the weather was not amenable to going outside and other indoor spaces were not available.

Schools wishing to adopt ASK methods should encourage a school-wide approach in which all teachers support each other's efforts to teach ASK lessons within the indoor/outdoor spaces available to them. ASK lessons are sometimes not as quiet and are certainly not as sedentary as traditional classroom lessons. When taught in shared school spaces such as hallways, ASK lessons can sometimes distract neighbouring classes. Ensuring that all staff understand and support the approach will help those teachers who choose to incorporate ASK lessons.

### Designating space and time for ASK Lessons

As shown on page 11, designating gym time for physically active lessons helped the ASK teacher at Newcombville Elementary succeed at delivering a higher number of ASK lessons than the school in which there was no specific time and space allocation for ASK lessons. This was particularly true during the winter months. Space constraints are the rule and not the exception in most schools within the



SSCRE, which makes it difficult, if not impossible to recommend that schools allocate specific indoor spaces for ASK lessons. This would become increasingly difficult as more teachers and grade levels adopt the ASK approach within a given school. Of course, where possible, allocating indoor space for ASK lessons can only serve to benefit efforts to incorporate PALS into school timetables.

However, there are examples from elementary schools in Norway in which the entire school participates in physically active lessons. At Vassenden School, a grade 1-10 school in Western Norway, all classes participate in physically active lessons on days when they do not have Physical Education. Thus, students at Vassenden School receive physically active content every day of the week. On any given day, half of the school participate in PALS on the outdoor playfield or in available indoor spaces during the period following lunch. Arrangements such as this are promising best practices to consider as ASK lessons are implemented within the Nova Scotian context.

### Collaboration

The three ASK teachers reported that they highly valued working together to share lesson ideas with each other and the ASK team during regularly scheduled ASK CLT meetings. Collaborating like this created a sense of teamwork and provided a reasonable level of expectation and accountability for the teachers to come up with new lesson ideas. Furthermore, ASK teachers also reported working with students to develop new lesson ideas. This was a productive strategy as it increased students' sense of engagement with the ASK method.

It is recommended that teachers and schools that choose to incorporate ASK lessons into their scope of practice encourage a collaborative approach, either through the designation of CLT meetings to the ASK method, through regular staff meetings on ASK lessons, or collaboration with other schools who choose to opt in to the ASK approach.

### Resources

The ASK teachers in the pilot relied on other teaching resources to create and deliver ASK lessons. Scoot! Games and other Super Teacher worksheets as well as Google Images are three internet resources that the pilot teachers reported relying upon throughout the pilot project year.

Some ASK lesson ideas can also be found on the website [activesmarterkids.com](http://activesmarterkids.com). The NS ASK project will be contributing lesson ideas created by the NS ASK Pilot Project teachers during the 2018-2019 school year to the website. It is recommended that future ASK teachers utilize these resources when designing and implementing ASK lessons with their own class.

## Next Steps: 2019-2020 Expansion of NS ASK Pilot

Given the overall positive outcomes from the NS ASK Pilot Project there is a plan for a second-year pilot and expansion and evaluation of ASK methods in Nova Scotian schools. The expansion model is to scale-up ASK methods within the two existing ASK schools by adding classes from one additional grade (Grade 6 at Bluenose Academy and Grade 4 at Newcombville Elementary)<sup>7</sup>. ASK methods will also be implemented in grade 5 classes in 4 additional schools located within the SSRCE. Efforts will be made to ensure that schools from across the SSRCE will be selected for participation in this next stage of the NS ASK Pilot to ensure that a broad range of socio-economic and geographic diversity is represented.

The interest in adopting ASK methods among elementary schools within the SSRCE is high. The scaled-up model of the pilot will take place for the entire 2019/20 school year, commencing in September 2019 and running until June 2020. The goal is for the ASK pilot classes to incorporate 3, 30-minute physically active lessons into their weekly timetable. This number of classes will be manageable for the staff person overseeing the continued implementation and evaluation of ASK methods within the context of a full-time position. This extension plan will greatly broaden the reach of the NS ASK Pilot. There are currently 71 ASK students participating in the NS ASK Pilot. Expansion as outlined above will reach approximately 360 students.

The selected new schools for the year two pilot are Bluenose Academy, Newcombville Elementary, West Northfield Elementary, Petite Riviere Elementary, Chester Area Middle School, and North Queens Community School.

The project lead for the year one pilot, Britt Vegsund, has been funded by the Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture, and Heritage, and the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg to work full-time on this expanded pilot from August 2019-August 2020. The main deliverables for this expanded pilot are an evaluation report, and recommendations for a sustainable and efficient model for the provincial expansion of ASK lessons.

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<sup>7</sup> The rationale for this is that grade 5 is the highest grade at Newcombville Elementary, so it is the next logical grade. At Bluenose Academy adding grade 6 has the advantage that the students will be well-versed in ASK methods which may prove beneficial for the newly-minted grade 6 ASK teachers.

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## Acknowledgements

The success of the Nova Scotia ASK Pilot Project lies with the 3 dedicated teachers who put their heart and soul into this project. Nina Matthews, Jennifer Landry, and Brody Cannon worked tirelessly, week in and week out to pioneer the ASK method here in Nova Scotia. Despite the many challenges they faced, they persevered and have helped create a solid foundation for the expansion of ASK teaching methods here in Nova Scotia. Kudos to them!

Thanks also to the students from both Bluenose Academy and Newcombville Elementary who shared their enthusiasm for ASK lessons during evaluation focus groups and class visits. You are the biggest advocates for the ASK method, and the reason why we continue this work!

Many thanks also to everyone who collaborated to make the NS ASK Pilot Project happen. Debby Smith from the Community, Sport and Recreation Division of the Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage has held the vision for ASK in Nova Scotia since the project's earliest days. Every success story has its champion, and Debby Smith holds that title in this one. Thanks also to Sarah Murphy, Jillian Griffin, and Anna Haanstra for the crucial role you've all played in the implementation and evaluation of ASK methods. This project would not have unfolded as it has without you. Thank you to Trudy Payne and the staff and Council at the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg for encouraging the development of this project. Thank you also to Steve McGill and Allan Turner for welcoming the ASK Pilot Project into your schools and acting as champions within the region. And finally, many thanks to Øystein Lerum and Geir Kåre Resaland at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences for the inspiration and continued support of the expansion of ASK methods across the Atlantic.

## Appendix A: NS ASK Pilot Project Implementation Schedule

### *Year One: Projected Implementation Schedule 2018-2019*

<b>Month</b>	<b>Task</b>
<b>Oct-Dec 2017</b>	Project conception – Research trip to Norway elementary school to research physical active and outdoor play in the school setting
<b>Jan-April 2018</b>	Initiate contact with principals Communicate with key partners Confirm participation of pilot schools
<b>April</b>	Project inception trip: Collection of Norway resources and support materials Develop pilot implementation schedule
<b>April - May</b>	Delivery of all-staff overview presentation & collect insights and input Teacher training module development One page communication sheets (general, teacher, parent) Identify needs for parent communication Evaluation plan - draft
<b>June</b>	Introductory module delivery (6hrs) Discussion with pilot sites about evaluation and reporting mechanisms
<b>July-August</b>	Material and communications development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher resource binder</li> <li>• Parent information package &amp; communications</li> <li>• Pilot site equipment kits purchased and prepared</li> <li>• General communications package</li> </ul> Project implementation documentation – ongoing Evaluation plan and reporting mechanisms – finalize
<b>September</b>	Initiate Pilot site implementation Pilot site Kick-Off training Parent info sessions and packages PAL implementation site support and visits (daily to weekly during set PAL times @ each site) Initiate sharing culture; online database & sharing between pilots schools Initiate evaluation data collection
<b>October - November</b>	Site visits continued as appropriate Collection of pilot site activity development Interim process evaluation data collection Sharing culture meeting with pilot class teachers Use Collaborative Learning Time (CLT) to support ASK teachers, gather process evaluation data, record the creation of ASK lesson plans.
<b>December</b>	Option 1: Pilot wrap up Option 2: Continue pilot into Spring* *Due to Success of pilot, as reported by ASK teachers at both sites and on-going support of school administrators, the NS ASK Pilot will continue until the end the school year (June 2019). Commence ASK student experience data collection. This includes; an ASK student experience survey (created by the ASK team, and administered by ASK teachers in class), student focus groups (size 8-11 students), with each ASK class, and a classroom-based activity in which students create a promotional poster for ASK.

	Continuation of Collaborative Learning Time (CLT) to support ASK teachers, gather process evaluation data, record the creation of ASK lesson plans.
<b>Jan – April 2019</b>	<p>Continuation of ASK student experience focus groups.</p> <p>Commence outcome evaluation data collection with ASK Teachers and school administrators. This will include ASK teacher focus groups during CLT meetings, as well as individual interviews with teachers.</p> <p>Continuation of Collaborative Learning Time (CLT) to support ASK teachers, gather process evaluation data, record the creation of ASK lesson plans.</p> <p>Data analysis from student and teacher experience research.</p> <p>Creation of mid-term ASK Evaluation report, to be released early April 2019.</p>
<b>April-June 2019</b>	<p>Sharing of results, learnings and next steps.</p> <p>Dissemination of a Call for Interest to all elementary schools within the SSRCE for participation in year 2 of ASK (grade 5 classes).</p> <p>Initiate and respond to interest at other schools.</p> <p>Identify criteria for selection of 4 new schools in the SSRCE.</p> <p>Review roles and responsibilities; workload.</p> <p>Revisit equipment needs, funding needs and options.</p> <p>Update evaluation plan.</p> <p>Pilot implementation documentation compiled.</p> <p>Commence Professional Development in ASK methods for new ASK teachers (from 4 new schools, as well as additional teachers at original ASK schools).</p>