

Physical Education News

July/August 2013

This month's issue of the news tackles the issue of waiving, exempting and making substitutions for high quality physical education at the secondary level.

When we eliminate academic content such as visual arts, theatre, music, vocational arts, and physical education (the so called non-academic subject areas) from the school's curriculum it is like training young people for the marathon of life by asking them to exercise one leg.

Education should develop the whole child and not just the traditional subjects at the top of the educational hierarchy (i.e., English/language arts, mathematics, and science). A holistic and balanced education should develop the cognitive, social/emotional, and motor domains of learning. Each part of such a balanced curriculum represents an essential area of knowledge and skill to which all students should have equal access.

A narrow curriculum that emphasizes only reading, writing, and math will lead to a narrow and unbalanced education. The result for many students who have the potential to be highly skilled and intelligent within these missing areas will be an inability to learn where their true strengths lie. These students may complete their K-12 education feeling unsuccessful and incompetent. A vital component of a holistic education is a physical education.

Student participation in physical education helps improve cognitive function, which in turn, promotes learning in other academic subject areas (Ratey, 2002; Ratey & Hagerman, 2008). It helps students learn about

their abilities, aptitudes, limitations, and potential. Furthermore, it provides opportunities for students to develop creativity, positive attitudes toward physical activity, assume more personal and social responsibility, and meet performance obligations as individuals and in groups.

Despite the many benefits of physical education U. S. school districts often allow students to be exempted from participation in this important subject. However, many government, medical and education leaders as well as parents, and students are in favor of quality, daily physical education (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2003; NASPE & the American Heart Association, 2006).

The U. S. Surgeon General's (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1996) report on physical activity and health recommended that schools (and universities) reintroduce daily, quality physical activity as a key component of a comprehensive education. Healthy people 2010 (USDHHS, 2000) includes the following recommendation: increase the proportion of the nation's public and private schools that require daily physical education for all schools. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Heart Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the National Association of State Boards of Education recommended that all students participate in daily physical education or its equivalent (NASPE & the American Heart Association, 2006).

Ninety-five percent of parents want physical education included in the school curriculum for K-12 students (NASPE & American Heart Association, 2006). A survey conducted by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2003) found that 92% of teens wanted to receive daily physical education.

Neuroscience also supports more physical education and physical activity in schools since they promote cognitive development. Dr. John

Ratey (2002), Harvard Medical School professor of psychiatry, told us that physical activity optimizes alertness, attention, motivation and mental health. When students learn complex motor patterns complex synaptic connections are formed in the brain that improve its ability to process new information. The brain responds to motor development like muscles do, growing with it and withering without (Ratey & Hagerman, 2008).

California and Texas mandate physical education learning time and assessment of physical education learners. They have found that their students who attend physical education and are physically fit, score higher on their state standardized tests, provide less discipline problems, and attend school more often than their less fit peers (California Department of Education, 2004; Carlson, Fulton, & Lee, 2008; NASPE, 2002; Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2007; Texas Education Agency, 2009).

More time in physical education leads to improved grades and standardized test scores; while daily physical education does not adversely affect academic performance it enhances it (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2007; Singh et al, 2012). Regular physical education improves concentration and cognitive functioning (University of Illinois, 2009).

High quality daily public school physical education should also play a major role in reducing obesity and spiraling health care costs. It is estimated that obesity will cost the U. S. about \$344 billion in medical expenses by 2018 (about 21% of U. S. health care spending (United Health Foundation, 2009). This can be achieved by following the National Association of Sport and Physical Education's (2004) recommendation of providing elementary students with 150 minutes of quality physical education each week and students in grades seven through twelve with 225 minutes per week. However, such opportunity for students to learn in physical education is difficult to achieve when waivers, exemptions and substitutions are provided for regular participation in physical education to school districts by state departments of education .

Interscholastic athletics and other physical activity based programs should not serve as a proxy for regular instruction and participation in physical education. Physical Education and Interscholastic athletics are separate and distinct with different purposes.

Participation in a quality physical education program from Pre-K through grade twelve is an integral and essential component of a comprehensive education. Participation in team and individual competitive sports can provide an individual with meaningful, challenging, and rewarding athletic experiences. A competitive, athletic lifestyle contributes to an active lifestyle. However, competitive sport experiences are only one part of a physically active and healthy lifestyle and should never, under any circumstance, serve as a substitute for regular participation in a physical education program. Athletics and physical education have different purposes.

Physical education is not simply a physical activity period. The objective of a physical education program is to equip all students with the skills, understanding, attitudes, and confidence necessary to adopt and maintain a health enhancing and physically active lifestyle. When students participate in a quality physical education program from kindergarten through grade twelve the result is a physically educated person. This is one who (NASPE, 2004):

1. Demonstrates competency in motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities (i.e., social/cultural/creative dance, body management/gymnastics, individual and team sports, aquatics, track and field, and cooperative physical activities)
2. Demonstrates understanding of movement concepts, principles, strategies, and tactics as they apply to the learning and performance of physical activities

3. Participates regularly in physical activity (at least 60 minutes and up to several hours of moderate to vigorous physical activity on most if not all days per week)
4. Achieves and maintains a health enhancing level of physical fitness (cardiorespiratory fitness, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, and body composition)
5. Exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others in physical activity settings
6. Values physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and or social interaction

Interscholastic sport will not equip students with the skill and understanding required to become physically educated nor do they provide a comparable educational experience as does physical education.

A quality physical education curriculum is aligned with National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE, 2004) content standards and Massachusetts Department of Education comprehensive health education frameworks. It offers learners developmentally appropriate learning experiences and a clear scope and sequence. Graduates who become physically educated will take with them the skills that will support a healthy, physically active and productive life which is of grave importance in this era of obesity, overweight and health misinformation. Interscholastic athletic programs help children and adolescents develop sport specific skills and enjoy safe participation.

In order to achieve the objectives and enjoy the benefits of a physical education program and become physically educated all students must be active participants in all physical education learning experiences from kindergarten through grade twelve. Physical education learning experiences address all three domains of learning – the cognitive, affective (i.e., emotional/social), and psychomotor development of every child (not just the highly skilled). Physical educators include all students by

differentiating what students learn, how they learn it, and how they demonstrate what they've learned. Physical educators match curriculum content, instruction and assessment to the learner's current skills and understanding. Further, they provide tasks that ignite curiosity and passion within each learner by matching tasks to the preferred learning style of each student in order to increase learning and achievement. Finally, many children and adolescents will not play competitive sports as adults. Physical education helps learners develop competency in a variety of lifetime movement skills.

If a school system were to implement a system of substitution of an activity-based program for an educationally based program, such as physical education, it would have to overcome many obstacles.

1. What would be done if a student were injured, quit a team, lost interest in the activity, was ruled ineligible, or was suspended due to rules violations? Having students re-enter physical education in the middle of a unit of study having missed essential learning experiences would diminish that student's learning and achievement and be disruptive to the physical education learning environment.

2. Interscholastic coaches are not required to be lifelong learners. All physical educators must be highly qualified. Physical educators must hold a valid teaching certificate from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. These teachers must participate in continuing professional development learning experiences, renewing their license every five years. Physical educators are required by the Massachusetts Department of Education to make a continuing effort to keep informed of current trends and best practices in teaching, learning and their curriculum content area. U. S. high school coaches are typically not held to such professional standards.

3. Increasingly interscholastic athletic coaches come from outside the schools in which they coach. These coaches are often

disconnected from the school's culture, values and goals as well as the student athletes themselves.

4. What affect would a system of substitution have on the overall learning environment of the school as a whole? What other groups will want to substitute an activity based program for a course of study? Will schools substitute writing for the school newspaper for regular instruction and participation in an English class? Could being a member of the math team serve as a substitute for regular instruction and participation in geometry, trigonometry, or calculus?

5. Physical education is the only place where students learn to understand concepts of health related physical fitness. A complete and detailed understanding of health related fitness that includes cardio-respiratory endurance, muscular strength and muscular endurance, joint flexibility and mobility, body composition, nutrition, optimal wellness, and healthy habits can only be gained by regular instruction and participation in physical education. A strong understanding of health related fitness is essential for all students. Students must learn how to apply their understanding so they can make informed and optimal health decisions and judgments about the quality of health information. This empowers them to lead a productive and physically active, health enhancing lifestyle.

All of the courses, sports, clubs and extracurricular activities in schools offer our learners rich, meaningful, challenging, and rewarding learning experiences. Each class and extracurricular activity:

- Challenges learners to think deeply and critically in a unique way
- Provides students with a unique variety of learning experiences, goals, and skills

- Receives a unique and diverse group of learners with varied interests, skills, motivation and attitudes, learning styles, readiness, and understanding who enter learning on a variety of levels
- Requires our learners to demonstrate their learning and achievement in a variety of unique ways

Each course of study and extracurricular activity offered is unique and thus separate from all other courses and extracurricular activities. We should never allow one to serve as a substitute for regular instruction and participation in the unique and rewarding learning experiences another can provide our students.

It is inappropriate to substitute experiences that occur outside of the instructional program for regular participation in the physical education program. To excuse varsity athletes, members of marching band, cheerleading, or other students who engage in physical activity based programs robs students of an opportunity to become physically educated. Physical education programs have distinctly different objectives and purposes than these other programs. It is educationally unacceptable to deprive students of the opportunity to experience a comprehensive, sequential curriculum that leads to the development of a physically educated person.

Excluding by substitution (of alternate programs), any student from a comprehensive and sequential physical education program will have a negative impact on the social framework of the school as well as the basic educational program for all students. Schools within a democracy should model that democracy, avoid setting up privileged groups, and educate the whole student mentally, socially and physically.

Physical educators and coaches try to provide students with the best physical education and athletic experiences they can. They each hold high expectations for students and athletes. We must not compromise a

program nor deprive students the benefits one program can provide by substituting it with another.

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