

Value of Physical Education

Why Should Physical Education be Included in Public Education?

An education of the body or a physical education was once an indispensable part of school curricula during the beginnings of formal education. Physical education and physical activity once stood at the center of ancient Greek schools and culture providing the foundation from which education arose. Physical and intellectual learning experiences were essential and inseparable parts of education. Greeks believed in a sound mind in a sound body and the concept of “arête” or a quest for excellence (Siedentop, 2003). The period of education that has followed the Greco-roman period of equal treatment to the cognitive and psychomotor domains of learning has seen a lack of balance in favor of the cognitive within schools and those who write about education (Ziegler, 2005).

Physical education is an essential subject area for learning. It helps students become competent movers, which in turn, builds self-confidence and lays a foundation for participation in lifetime physical activity. Its movement content helps improve cognitive function, which in turn, promotes learning in other subject areas (Ratey, 2002; Ratey & Hagerman, 2008). It helps students learn about their abilities, aptitudes, limitations, and potential. 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.

Who supports physical education?

Despite the many obstacles facing physical education 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). These groups may support the creation and implementation of a national physical education curriculum.

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. NASPE, 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 recommend that all students participate in daily physical education. 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.

Brain based research 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, tells 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 improving the brain's 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 (NASPE, 2002; Texas Education Agency, 2009).

Some countries such as Japan (Nakai & Metzler, 2005), Singapore (Wright, McNeill & Schempp, 2005), South Korea (Yoo & Kim, 2005), and England (Smith, 1993) mandate a physical education curriculum and recommend opportunity to learn (OTL) standards (i.e., standards that describe the conditions through which teaching and learning should occur). Australia is moving toward a national curriculum (Manzo, 2009). These countries have found that the extra time spent on physical education does not adversely impact student learning in other subjects. They routinely achieve high scores on international standardized tests such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (Mullis, Martin, & Foy, 2008).

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