

Physical Education and California Schools

State and national legislation has made childhood obesity prevention and reduction a priority by creating new nutrition guidelines and requiring that districts adopt a local school wellness policy. In addition to addressing student nutrition, district wellness policies must include goals for physical activity, with the objectives of promoting student health and reducing childhood obesity. This policy brief describes research showing the benefits of physical activity for student learning, explains the state requirements and standards, highlights board actions to support physical education and lists additional resources board members and others might find useful.

Implications of physical activity for academic achievement

The Journal of "Sports and Exercise Physiology," in an analysis of nearly 200 previously conducted studies that evaluated the interaction between physical activity and behavior, found evidence that regular physical activity supports learning.¹ One study found that: 1) California schools with a high percentage of students who did not participate in regular physical activity experienced smaller subsequent gains in SAT-9 test scores than schools with more active students; 2) higher achievement was associated with higher levels of fitness at each of the three grade levels measured and; 3) physical activity had beneficial consequences for academic progress in both low- and high-performing schools, regardless of location or socioeconomic status.² While none of these studies claimed that increased physical activity directly caused improved academic performance, each does support the idea that a balanced education that includes regular physical activity is correlated with improved ability to learn, classroom behavior and achievement.

A review of the literature shows no significant evidence to suggest that daily P.E. detracts from academic success.³ Even though P.E. may cut into academic class time, schools offering intense physical activity programs have seen positive effects on test scores in mathematics,

reading and writing, in addition to less disruptive classroom behavior.⁴ Recently, evidence of the connection between physical activity and academic achievement led the American Academy of Pediatrics to issue a policy statement regarding the need for the "expansion of school physical education, dissuading children from pursuing sedentary activities, providing suitable role models for physical activity and making activity-promoting changes in the environment."⁵

California physical education requirements

Education Code 51210 states that each school district maintaining an elementary school composed of any of grades 1-6 must provide students at least 200 minutes of P.E. instruction for every 10 school days, not including recesses and the lunch period.⁶ Education Code 51210.2 emphasizes that "the physical fitness and motor development of children in the public elementary schools is of equal importance to that of other elements of the curriculum." Education Code 51222 requires 400 minutes of P.E. every 10 school days for students in grades 7-12.

The California Department of Education monitors school districts through the Categorical Program Monitoring process to verify compliance with state law. The CDE selects 25 percent of the school districts for on-site monitoring each year; thus, each district participates in on-site review approximately once every four years.

The CPM review process evaluates P.E. compliance in three areas. The areas of evaluation for the 2006-2007 review are still being developed, but according to the CDE the process will likely be similar to the 2005-2006 review. The main component of the 2005-2006 review assessed whether students received the minimum 200 minutes for grades 1-6 or 400 minutes for grades 7-12 of P.E. instruction every 10 school days. Any school district found to be in noncompliance must develop a proposed resolution plan with the CDE and will be required to undergo an on-site review the following year.

California model content standards and curriculum

In 2004, California Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell appointed a committee of P.E. teachers and experts to create model P.E. content standards for students in grades K-12 throughout California. These standards outline the essential knowledge and skills that students should have and be able to demonstrate at each grade level. The state Board of Education adopted the standards on January 12, 2005. The document is accessible online at http://www.cahperd.org/calendar/images/PE_Standards.pdf.

The state's P.E. curriculum framework for grades K-12 was last adopted in 1994 and is scheduled to be revised in 2008. The standards and supporting materials are intended to assist in the establishment of specific goals and objectives for P.E. at every grade level.

Schools struggle to meet state physical education mandates

The California Center for Public Health Advocacy recently reviewed data collected from the CDE's compliance review records for P.E. instructional minutes provided in schools throughout the state over the past two years. This review found that at least 51 percent of districts are not in compliance with the current mandated minutes of P.E. for elementary schools. CCPHA also found the lack of compliance to be consistent throughout the state, regardless of school districts' economic status or location.

Daily participation in P.E. classes is down from 42 percent in 1991 to 28 percent in 2003, among U.S. high school students.⁷ In California, more than 15 percent of teens reported that their school either does not require or offer P.E. classes.⁸

Financial support for California physical education programs

The 2006-2007 California budget includes additional funding for P.E. to help districts make substantial investments to improve and expand the infrastructure of P.E. programs. The budget allocates \$40 million in ongoing incentive grants for school districts to hire additional credentialed P.E. teachers in elementary and middle schools. The funds will be made available through \$35,000 grants to approximately 1,100 schools serving any of grades K-8. Grant recipients shall be randomly selected and be equitably distributed based on type of

school, size and geographic location. In addition, the budget package includes a one-time block grant of \$500 million for arts, music and P.E. equipment. This funding is allocated at an equal amount per pupil, based on the number of students in grades K-12, with a minimum funding level of \$2,500 for small schools.

The board's role

Rigorous academic requirements and school accountability measures make district compliance with the P.E. mandates increasingly difficult and school boards and superintendents are faced with the challenge of finding ways to deliver quality P.E. programs to students. Boards play an important role in encouraging and facilitating physical activity in district schools. They provide community leadership and serve as advocates for children by working collectively to make decisions that will best serve all the students in the community. Boards will help ensure that students receive a well-rounded education by encouraging community support of P.E. programs that meet state requirements.

School boards can help ensure that all students have access to a high-quality, comprehensive and developmentally appropriate P.E. programs on a regular basis through the following actions:

Setting the direction for the community's schools

It is the responsibility of the board, working with staff and the community, to set a vision for the district's schools that drives the district's programs. In establishing a district vision that is focused on student learning and ensuring that more specific goals are aligned to this vision, the board has an opportunity to emphasize the importance of student health, including physical activity. The board can:

- Make P.E. a priority at all grade levels and educate community members on the importance of P.E. for young people.
- In accordance with federal law, adopt a wellness policy that clearly states P.E. goals to ensure educators, administrators, the board and community members understand the purpose and importance of P.E. For more information, refer to CSBA's Student Wellness Policy Brief.
- Adopt California's Physical Education Model Content Standards to ensure all schools within the state and district are striving to reach the same goals and objectives.

- Establishing an effective and efficient structure for the school district

The board must ensure that the district has the resources and other structures necessary to implement a high-quality P.E. program. Some suggestions include:

- Allocate funding and other resources to adequately staff and equip P.E. programs so that all students meet at least the minimum requirements for P.E.
- Support P.E. teachers by offering annual professional development opportunities that address activity-related skills and teaching ability. Various funding opportunities may be available to support professional development for P.E. teachers. Be sure to check with CDE and the National Association for Sport and Physical Education for more information.
- Adopt policies on P.E. that describe the board's expectations for the P.E. program and/or other opportunities for physical activity before, during and after school. The California School Boards Association and California Project LEAN (Leaders Encouraging Activity and Nutrition) developed a resource guide, entitled Successful Students Through Healthy Food and Fitness Policies, to provide direction for development of physical activity policies. Available at www.csba.org/ps/hf.cfm, the guide also contains a worksheet to facilitate board discussions of relevant policy issues.
- Minimize exemptions allowed for participating in P.E. classes and provide alternative activities for students with disabilities or who are otherwise unable to participate.

Providing support

Although the board does not implement policies or programs, the board may support the superintendent's and staff's implementation of the P.E. program through the decisions it makes in a variety of areas. For instance, the board can:

- Align the district's P.E. policy with other efforts to promote student health.
- Ensure that the board's decisions regarding other curricula and instruction allow sufficient time for schools to provide P.E.
- Model the desired behaviors by engaging in physical activity.

Ensuring accountability to the public

The board must monitor the district's progress in achieving its goals for educational programs, including the P.E. program. The board should:

- Schedule regular reports from the superintendent or his/her designee to the board regarding the P.E. program, including the amount of time devoted to P.E. instruction at each grade level.
- Ensure all P.E. instructional minutes are correctly documented. These minutes only include instructional time and do not include recess, before- or after-school programs or free play. The CDE provides guidelines on how to correctly report P.E. minutes and results of physical performance testing on its website. For more information, visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/pf>.

Acting as community leaders

Multiple opportunities exist for boards to increase physical activity opportunities for students throughout the community.

Consider connecting with parks and recreation departments and city and county officials to assess the adequacy of physical activity opportunities for youth throughout the community. Some suggestions include:

- Participate in joint-use agreements with community organizations in order to support P.E. programs.
- Communicate with students, parents, staff and the community about the district's priority on student wellness in order to build support for physical activity programs.
- Participate in the California Superintendents' Challenge. The Superintendents' Challenge is a challenge to all local school districts across California to improve their school nutrition standards and the health of all their students through the development and implementation of policies that promote proper nutrition and regular physical activity. The challenge also provides awards to exemplary districts who demonstrate success in supporting healthy students.

Resources

CSBA sample policies related to physical activity include:

BP/AR 6142.7 **Physical Education**

BP 5030 **Student Wellness**

BP/AR 6145.2 **Athletic Competition**

Successful Students Through Healthy Food and Fitness Policies is a resource guide published by CSBA and California Project LEAN. This comprehensive guide provides a step-by-step approach to enhancing the school environment through effective nutrition and physical activity policies and practices. Visit <http://www.csba.org/PS/hf.htm> for more information.

Physical Education Framework for California Public Schools, published by the California Department of Education and adopted by the California State Board of Education, is available free of charge at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/pn/fd/documents/pefrwk.pdf>.

National Association for Sport and Physical Education offers workshops, conferences and professional development opportunities for teachers. NASPE also provides numerous training tools and services to aid in the development of quality P.E. programs. Visit <http://www.aahperd.org/NASPE> for more information.

Guidelines for School and Community Programs to Promote Lifelong Physical Activity Among Young People, published in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, provides guidelines and recommendations for policies that promote enjoyable, lifelong physical activity. This report also includes information regarding P.E. curricula and instruction. The report is available free of charge at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00046823.htm>.

Action for Healthy Kids provides a variety of resources and tools to aid districts and schools in building quality educational programs. More information can be found by visiting <http://www.actionforhealthykids.org>.

Physical Activity Evaluation Handbook outlines the six basic steps of evaluating physical activity programs for state and local agencies and community organizations and illustrates each step with program examples. Appendices provide information about physical activity indicators, practical case studies and additional evaluation resources. The handbook is available at www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/handbook/index.htm.

The Surgeon General's *Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*. This report outlines strategies that communities can use in helping to address the health problems associated with overweight students and obesity, including requiring P.E. at all school grades, providing more healthy food options on school campuses and providing safe and accessible recreational facilities for residents of all ages. More information is available at www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity.

End notes

¹Etnier, J.L., Salazaw, W., Laners, DM, Petruzzello, SJ, Han, M, and Nowell, P. (1997). The influence of physical fitness and exercise upon cognitive functioning: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Physiology*. 19(3): 249-277.

²Hanson, TL, and Austin, GA. (2003). Are Student Health Risks and Low Resilience Assets an Impediment to the Academic Progress of Schools? *California Healthy Kids Factsheet 3*. Los Alamitos, CA: WestEd.

³Taras, H. (2005). Physical activity and student performance at school. *Journal of School Health*. 75: 214-218.

⁴Symons, CW, Cinelli, B, James, TC, and Groff, P. (1997). Bridging student health risks and academic achievement through comprehensive school health programs. *Journal of School Health*. 67(6): 220-227.

⁵Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness and Council on School Health. (2006). Active healthy living: Prevention of childhood obesity through increased physical activity. *Pediatrics*. 117(5): 1834-1842.

⁶Pursuant to Education Code 51223 elementary school districts maintaining grades 1-8 must provide instruction in P.E. for students in grades 7-8 that matches the requirement for other elementary schools of not less than 200 minutes each 10 school days.

⁷Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2004). Participation in high school physical education—United States, 1991-2003. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 53(SS-2), 1-95.

⁸Babey, SH, Diamant, AL, Brown, ER, and Hastert, T. (2005). *California Adolescents Increasingly Inactive*. Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research.

