



National Association for
Sport and Physical Education

an association of the American Alliance for Health,
Physical Education, Recreation and Dance

NASPE Sets the Standard

POSITION STATEMENT

Physical Education Is Critical to Educating the Whole Child

It is the position of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) that physical education is critical to educating the whole child, and that all students in grades K-12 should receive physical education on a daily basis.

Educating the Whole Child

Research confirms that students perform better in school when they are emotionally and physically healthy. They miss fewer classes, are less likely to engage in risky or antisocial behavior, concentrate more and attain higher test scores. Unfortunately, too many students go to class in less-than-optimal health.

ASCD, formerly the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, is leading a “whole child initiative” based on the premise that 21st-century demands require a new and better way of approaching education policy and practice: a whole-child approach to learning, teaching and community engagement. This whole-child approach to education holds that each child:

1. Enters school healthy, and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.
2. Learns in an intellectually challenging environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.
3. Is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.
4. Has access to personalized learning and is *supported* by qualified, caring adults.
5. Is challenged by a well-balanced curriculum and is prepared for success in college or further study and for employment in a global environment.

Visit www.ascd.org/wholechild for more information.

High-Quality Physical Education

Whole-child education addresses the body, mind and spirit. While physical education addresses the knowledge (cognitive) and social (affective) aspects of the child, its main focus is on physical development and skills (psychomotor).

The goal of physical education is to develop physically educated individuals who have the knowledge, skills and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of physical activity. The National Standards for Physical Education (NASPE, 2004), which provide the framework for high-quality physical education, defines a physically educated person as one who:

- Demonstrates competency in motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities (Standard 1).
- Demonstrates understanding of movement concepts, principles, strategies and tactics as they apply to the learning and performance of physical activities (Standard 2).
- Participates regularly in physical activity (Standard 3).
- Achieves and maintains a health-enhancing level of physical fitness (Standard 4).
- Exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others in physical activity settings (Standard 5).
- Values physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression and/or social interaction (Standard 6).

To meet those standards, three other aspects of high-quality physical education must be in place:

1. **The opportunity to learn.** That includes:
 - Instruction periods totaling a minimum of 150 minutes per week (elementary) and 225 minutes per week (middle and secondary school).
 - High-quality physical education specialists (NASPE, 2007) who provide a developmentally appropriate program.
 - Adequate equipment and facilities.
2. **Appropriate instruction practices.** Physical education programs can provide many benefits (e.g., physical competence, health-related fitness, self-responsibility and

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enjoyment of physical activity for all students so that they can be physically active for a lifetime), but only if they are well-planned and implemented. Specific components of appropriate instruction practices should focus on:

- Teaching for skill development.
- Teaching students to regularly participate in healthful physical activity.
- Teaching students how to improve physical fitness.
- Integrating physical activity with other subject areas.
- Teaching students' self-discipline.
- Teaching students to improved their own judgment.
- Teaching students how to manage and reduce stress.
- Teaching students how to strengthen peer relations.
- Teaching students about self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Teaching students how to set goals.

3. **Student and program assessment.** High-quality physical education programs provide instructional experiences for students, and they demonstrate student learning from those experiences. Assessment must form a consistent part of a physical education program to establish accountability for quality teaching and, subsequently, student learning.

Meaningful assessment can occur in a variety of ways (e.g., formal, informal, formative, summative, authentic, alternative, peer assessment, process-oriented). Results of these assessments should be used to improve practice and instruction, and to advocate for the physical education program.

Status of Physical Education in the United States

In addition to NASPE, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) recommend that all elementary school students participate in at least 150 minutes per week of physical education and that all middle and high school students participate in at least 225 minutes per week of physical education per week for the entire school year.

Physical education is institutionalized in most schools in the United States. In its School Health Policies and Practices Study (2006), CDC found that 63 percent of elementary schools, 83.9 percent of middle schools and 95.2 percent of high schools require physical education, yet the vast majority of students do not receive the nationally recommended *amount* of physical education. Only 3.8 percent of elementary schools, 7.9 percent of middle schools and 2.1 percent of high schools provide the nationally recommended daily physical education or its equivalent for the entire school year for students in all grades in the school, CDC found.

Support for High-Quality Physical Education

NASPE, CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Heart Association, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Education and the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sport all support the need for physical activity and for high-quality physical education in schools (NASPE, 2010).

Support From Within Physical Education

During difficult economic times, states and school districts often examine ways to decrease spending and balance the budget. As a result, physical education often is targeted for reduction or elimination. However, physical education (included in the whole-child approach) represents a critical investment in the immediate and long-term health and productivity of our nation's citizens (NASPE, 2009b). The need for increased amounts of physical activity is well documented (see the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services' 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans available at www.health.gov/paguidelines).

As Rink, Hall & Williams write in *Schoolwide Physical Activity* (2010): "The cornerstone of a comprehensive school effort to increase the physical activity levels of students is a good physical education program."

Also, Le Masurier and Corbin (2006) identify these 10 reasons in support of physical education:

1. Regular physical activity helps prevent disease.
2. Regular physical activity promotes lifetime wellness.
3. Quality physical education can help fight obesity.
4. Quality physical education can help promote lifelong physical fitness.
5. Quality physical education provides unique opportunities for activity.
6. Quality physical education teaches self-management and motor skills.

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7. Physical activity and physical education promote learning.
8. Regular physical activity makes economic sense.
9. Physical education is widely endorsed.
10. Quality physical education helps to educate the total child.

Support From Health Professionals

The CDC provides guidelines for school and community programs to promote life-long physical activity among young people. Those guidelines include several key points related to policy, environment, physical education, health education, extracurricular activities, parental involvement, personnel training, health services, community programs and evaluation (CDC, 2010).

Support From National Surveys

Physical education enjoys tremendous parental support. Based on recent surveys, many parents believe that physical activity and physical education should be regular components of the K-12 school curriculum for all students.

Further evidence of support:

- Some 31 percent of physical education teachers polled perceive increased support from parents regarding students' physical activity, and 27 percent perceive increased support from parents regarding students' physical education (NASPE, 2009a).
- Nearly 95 percent of parents polled say that regular daily physical activity helps children perform better academically and should be a part of the K-12 school curriculum for all students (NASPE, 2003).
- More than 75 percent of parents polled say that additional amounts of physical education could make a positive impact on childhood obesity (NASPE, 2003).
- Between 54 percent and 84 percent of parents polled say that physical education is at least as important as another subject (NASPE, 2003).
- More than 90 percent of parents polled express the desire for more physical education in schools, particularly for fighting childhood obesity (Harvard School of Public Health, 2003).

For more information, see NASPE's [Shape of the Nation, 2010](#).

Support From Research

Research has shown physical activity's and physical education's positive impacts on student attendance, participation and enthusiasm for academic subjects and motivation to learn, as well as reduced behavior and discipline problems (Pellegrini, Huberty & Jones, 1995; Strong, et al., 2005). In addition, numerous studies show significant positive relationships between physical fitness and academic achievement, including improved performance on standardized tests (California Department of Education, 2005; Texas Education Agency, 2009; CDC, 2010).

Support From the National Physical Activity Plan

In part because of intense pressure to improve performance and increase test scores, schools have reduced the amount of time that students are physically active during the school day. Recent research, however, indicates that physical activity has a positive impact on academic performance.

The U.S. National Physical Activity Plan (<http://www.physicalactivityplan.org/index.php>) encourages teachers, coaches, administrators and school district officials to take a leadership role in carrying out seven strategies for increasing physical activity. The first two strategies focus on high-quality physical education:

1. Provide access to and opportunities for high-quality, comprehensive physical activity programs, anchored by physical education in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 education settings. Ensure that the programs are physically active, inclusive, safe, and developmentally and culturally appropriate.
2. Develop and implement state and school district policies requiring school accountability for the quality and quantity of physical education and physical activity programs.

Find more information at <http://www.physicalactivityplan.org/index.php>.

Conclusion

A high-quality physical education program offers students more than just skill development and physical activity; it emphasizes student learning in all three domains (psychomotor, cognitive and affective). While the psychomotor domain is the most obvious domain of focus in a high-

quality physical education setting, purposeful instruction in the cognitive and affective domains also enhances student development and fosters a healthy, physically active lifestyle.

Students who are unhealthy, are inactive and lack good nutrition often are unmotivated to learn in the classroom, and that presents a barrier to a complete education. NASPE's position is that a high-quality physical education program, supported by the school and community, is vital to providing students with the education they need and deserve, and is critical to a complete education and development of the whole child.

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