

Physical Education for the 21st Century

Physical Education & Public Health

American school-aged youth are becoming the least physically fit generation in history. In the past 30 years, overweight and obesity levels in children have more than doubled. There is evidence that today's youth will develop significant health complications such as heart disease, Type II Diabetes (formerly known as adult-onset diabetes) and premature death, unless they exercise more and eat less. Children spend a considerable amount of time in school, and schools can be powerful motivators for helping them adopt healthy lifestyles. Several studies demonstrate school-based physical education programs are 1 of the most effective ways to facilitate the levels of physical activity that will have a lasting effect on the health and wellness of our youth.

Unfortunately, in many school districts across the country, the role of the Physical Education Specialist has been eliminated or drastically reduced. With recent national guidelines recommending that young people accumulate at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily, having a quality physical education program in every school must be a national priority. The realities of the times we live in demand that we prioritize health-related physical education quantity and quality, and ultimately bring physical education, taught by certified specialists, back to every school in the United States.

Physical Education Defined

Physical Education is a course of study/curriculum that provides students opportunities to learn and practice skills and behaviors critical to being physically active throughout their lifetimes. Teachers of physical education assess student knowledge, motor and social skills, and provide instruction in a supportive environment. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) states that "The goal of physical education is to develop physically educated individuals who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity." NASPE recommends a minimum of 150 minutes of physical education for elementary school children and 225 minutes for middle and high school students each 5-day school week.

Physical Education Frequency and Duration

SPARK believes in and advocates for quality, daily, physical education for all students Pre-K through 12th grade. Research shows that cardiovascular fitness and muscular strength and development decrease within 72 hours. Therefore, to achieve the health benefits, children must receive PE instruction a minimum of 3 times per week. Additionally, the SPARK

study produced statistically significant improvements in physical fitness scores (using the Fitnessgram test) in schools where children participated in SPARK PE (approximately) 3, 30-minute sessions a week.

Physical Education Standards

SPARK curriculum objectives and outcomes are aligned with the National Association of Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) National Standards for Physical Education.

While SPARK shows which NASPE Standards are addressed on the back of each activity page, it is important to note that activities are simply the vehicles used to meet a particular standard. For example, an activity in *Chasing and Fleeing* addresses NASPE Standards 1 and 4, but may be instructed to incorporate other standards. By simply playing a chasing and fleeing game, a student may not be able to explain how changing speed and direction allows one to move away from a chaser. The teacher must provide this information as a complement to the activity in order to address Standard 2. Students discover answers by playing/participating and then being asked questions about what they experienced and learned (debrief). They may never have thought of that question on their own. It's the teacher's role to pose these questions to foster student processing on this level.

National Standards for Physical Education *(With permission from NASPE)*

A physically educated person:

Standard 1: Demonstrates competency in motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities.

Standard 2: Demonstrates understanding of movement concepts, principles, strategies, and tactics as they apply to the learning and performance of physical activities.

Standard 3: Participates regularly in physical activity.

Standard 4: Achieves and maintains a health-enhancing level of physical fitness.

Standard 5: Exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others in physical activity settings.

Standard 6: Values physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and/or social interaction.

Physical Activity Defined

Physical activity involves bodily movement of any type. It includes recreational and daily activities, and provides health benefits when the intensity increases heart rate and requires heavier than normal breathing. NASPE recommends children accumulate at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day. Opportunities for physical activity include time spent before school, during recess, lunch, physical education, in classroom-based movement, and in sport and play opportunities that occur after school.

Health Benefits of Physical Activity

Extensive research supports the health benefits of physical activity for children:

- Self-esteem – increased
- Psychological well-being – increased
- Skeletal health – increased
- Anxiety and depression – decreased
- Overweight and obesity – decreased
- HDL cholesterol -- decreased
- Blood Pressure – decreased
- Insulin Resistance – decreased
- Musculoskeletal injuries – decreased

Physical Activity Guidelines

The Council for Physical Education for Children (COPEC) has developed the following guidelines to ensure that physical activities are developmentally appropriate and that children accumulate adequate amounts of physical activity:

Physical Activity Guidelines for Elementary School Children

(COPEC/NASPE Position Statement, with permission from NASPE)

Guideline 1: Children should accumulate at least 60 minutes, and up to several hours, of age-appropriate physical activity on all, or most days of the week. This daily accumulation should include moderate and vigorous physical activity with the majority of the time being spent in activity that is intermittent in nature.

Guideline 2: Children should participate in several bouts of physical activity lasting 15 minutes or more each day.

Guideline 3: Children should participate each day in a variety of age-appropriate physical activities designed to achieve optimal health, wellness, fitness, and performance benefits.

Guideline 4: Extended periods (periods of 2 hours or more) of inactivity are discouraged for children, especially during the daytime hours.

SPARK Promotes Physical Activity Outside of PE

Few, if any, physical education programs ensure children reach suggested daily levels of physical activity. Therefore, it is important for children to be active outside their physical education class. SPARK facilitates this objective in several ways:

Generalizable Skills and Activities

Activities, challenges and games are selected on the merit of their potential to teach viable physical skills, experience success while engaged in movement opportunities, and generalize to the home and community.

Home Integrations

Approximately 1/4 of the *SPARK Activities* include a Home Integration which challenge students to complete enjoyable activity tasks with their friends and families at home and in the community.

Home Plays

A *Home Play* is a take-home page (1 for each of the *Spotlight on Skills* units) to be distributed to students on the first day of the unit. *Home Plays* include enjoyable, physically active challenges on 1 side and interesting facts on the other. They are designed to post on the refrigerator, be visible for the month, and keep students active outside of school.