



National Association for Sport and Physical Education

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

NASPE Sets the Standard

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REDUCING SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS IS COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE TO STUDENT HEALTH AND LEARNING AND TO OUR NATION'S ECONOMIC HEALTH

During this economic recession, states and school districts are examining every expenditure as they work to balance their budgets. One curricular area that traditionally draws consideration for reduction is physical education. The reason might be a lack of understanding about the purpose and benefits of a quality physical education program.

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.¹ Healthy lifestyle habits, including healthy eating and physical activity, can lower the risk of becoming obese and developing related diseases.² One of the major drivers of the current economic recession is high health-care costs, and research suggests that those costs will continue to rise. In the 2009 edition of *America's Health Rankings™*, it is estimated that obesity will cost the United States about \$344 billion in medical-related expenses by 2018, eating up about 21 percent of the nation's health-care spending.³

Now is the time to invest in prevention, not reduce or eliminate obesity- and chronic disease-prevention programs such as school physical education. Indeed, physical education represents a critical investment in the immediate and long-term health and productivity of our nation's citizens.

School-based physical education has many benefits, including increasing physical activity and improving physical fitness and muscular endurance.³ Increasing physical activity through physical education is a public health strategy for reducing childhood obesity.

Physical education improves students' health, which improves their ability to learn. A body of research shows a relationship between physical fitness and academic performance. A 2004 California Department of Education study, using data from a standardized health-related fitness testing protocol and the California Standards Tests, showed a strong positive relationship between physical fitness and academic achievement.⁴ A 2007-08 study of more than 2.4 million Texas students found that students who were physically fit were more likely to do well on the state's standardized tests and have better school attendance records and fewer disciplinary referrals than students who were not physically fit.⁵ In 2009, the New York City Health Department and Department of Education reported that physical fitness was associated with higher academic achievement among their public school students.⁶

Many school systems reduce or eliminate physical education under the assumption that more classroom time will improve academic performance and increase standardized test scores.⁷ However, studies in the United States, Canada and Australia have demonstrated clearly that physical activity need not be sacrificed for academic excellence.⁷

The science-based federal *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* states that children and adolescents should perform 60 minutes (1 hour) or more of physical activity daily.⁸ The Institute of Medicine recommends that schools provide at least half of that recommended daily physical activity time for youths⁹ at least 30 minutes per day. These scientific statements provide a call to action.

Students who are fit and healthy are more ready to learn. Physical education is a critical contributor to physical fitness, health and academic performance. Reducing or eliminating school physical education programs is counter-productive to student health and learning, as well as to our nation's economic health. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education urges education policy-makers and decision-makers to support and invest in quality school physical education programs.

For more information about physical education, visit www.naspeinfo.org or e-mail naspe@aahperd.org.

References

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