

TEACHING AMERICA'S KIDS A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE: PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OVERVIEW

One-third of children and adolescents ages 2-19 are overweight or obese, with 17.2% of those 2-19 being obese.¹ Higher body mass index in childhood is associated with greater risk of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and premature death.^{2,3} Establishing lifelong healthy habits through effective physical education programs are an important way to address children's health and well-being.



Regular physical activity and improved fitness is associated with a lower risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity.⁵⁻⁸ Active kids learn better.⁸ Improved physical activity is associated with better grades in schools.⁹ Physical education provides children with the opportunity to learn social skills and grow peer relationships and is associated with fewer behavioral and emotional problems.¹⁰ The American Heart Association recommends children receive at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous-intensity physical activity every day that is developmentally appropriate, enjoyable, and involves a variety of activities.⁴

CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

Only 27.1% of high school students met recommended levels of daily PA in 2015.¹ Less than 30% of students attended physical education classes five days a week in school while 41.7% of students spent three or more hours on computers or video games for non-school activities.^{1,9} 91% of parents feel that there should be more physical education in schools.⁹ Many states have set standards for physical education programs, with the majority requiring teachers to meet state professional requirements.⁹ However, many states continue to allow other activities as substitutions for physical education including extracurricular activities and alternative class credit.⁹ The median physical education budget for schools was just \$764 per school per year and according to the American Society of Civil Engineers, 31% of athletic facilities and 27% of playgrounds are rated as in fair or poor condition.^{9,11}

PHYSICAL EDUCATION SUPPORTS HEALTHY KIDS

Physical fitness is positively associated with better grades in school and on standardized exams, and related to improved concentration and attentiveness.^{12,13} A meta-analysis by the CDC found adding physical activity to the school day may enhance and does not detract from academic performance.¹³ Being active on a regular basis can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression and is related to improved self-esteem and greater development in social settings.⁹ Physical education builds physical literacy which is defined as "the ability, confidence, and desire to be physically active for life."¹⁵



EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA)

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 includes physical education and health in the definition of a well-rounded education, making for the first time ever, these critical subjects eligible for Title I funding, a main funding mechanism for most schools. In addition to Title I funding, ESSA's definition of a well-rounded education allows local education authorities (LEAs) to access federal funding for schools in Titles II and IV to implement or improve physical education programs.⁹ ESSA also contained a grant program under which physical education was eligible to compete.

“The benefits of physical education ring clear as a school bell. With effective physical education, we can keep kids’ hearts healthy and their minds in gear to do their best at school every day.”

- Nancy Brown AHA CEO¹⁷

THE ASSOCIATION ADVOCATES

The association advocates at all levels of government to pursue its mission and goals, including:

Increase the number of state education ESSA accountability plans that include physical education as an indicator.

Support tax incentives to help schools improve PE by investing in building and repairing infrastructure, equipment, technology, curricula and teachers.

Promote more frequent, effective physical education in schools as the cornerstone of comprehensive physical activity before, during and after the school day.

Address standards-based curriculum, appropriate professional development for teachers, teacher certification/licensing, disallowing waivers/substitution, student assessment, and accountability.

Requiring school districts and schools provide all students with 150 minutes per week of physical education in elementary schools and 225 minutes per week in middle schools and high schools

Establish funding for technical assistance, dedicated equipment, student instruction, and facilities improvement to enhance physical education programs with a focus on “high-needs schools”.

Support other physical activity opportunities including active transportation policy (Safe Routes to School), recess, classroom physical activity breaks, shared use policies, and intramural/club/varsity sports programs.

Secure funding for physical education, health education, and physical activity programs available through Title IV, Part A of ESSA.

For more information on specific policy recommendations endorsed the American Heart Association / American Stroke Association, please visit <http://bit.ly/HEARTorg-policyresearch> or connect with us on Twitter at @AmHeartAdvocacy using the hashtag #AHAPolicy

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