



Shake Up PE's Status Quo

When done right, physical education can contribute to overall well-being, fitness, and improved academic behaviors

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Have you ever wondered what your students are supposed to learn in physical education (PE) classes? This much-maligned subject area is often seen as a place where students play games and let off steam. Yet, the Society of Health & Physical Educators (SHAPE America) suggests that when done well, the subject educates the whole child and helps students develop the knowledge and skills needed to be physically active throughout their lives.

The physical activity during a lesson can contribute to well-being, fitness, and improved academic behaviors. Lessons with carefully planned progressions and practice tasks integrate systematic assessments that aid in monitoring student learning. If this



doesn't sound like your physical education program, it might be time to shake up the status quo and help your PE teacher become an agent of change. Here are a few strategies to get that started.

Know What Quality PE Looks Like

According to the *National Standards & Grade-Level Outcomes for K–12 Physical Education*, the purpose of PE is “to develop physically literate individuals who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity.” The content needed to meet that goal is described in the profession’s national standards, first published by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education in 1992. The standards state that a physically literate individual should be able to do the following by the time they graduate from high school:

- Demonstrate competency in a variety of motor skills and movement patterns.
- Apply knowledge of concepts, principles, strategies, and tactics related to movement and performance.
- Demonstrate the knowledge and skills to achieve and maintain a health-enhancing level of physical activity and fitness.
- Exhibit responsible personal and social behavior that respects oneself and others.

- Recognize the value of physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and/or social interaction.

In essence, these standards outline the “destination” of physical education, and there are many different ways to get there.

For additional guidance along the way, SHAPE America recently developed grade-level outcomes to form a curriculum framework for teachers to use. These outcomes provide detailed direction, as well as measurable targets for each grade level and grade span (elementary, middle, and high school). The following are examples of the specificity of the grade-level outcomes:

- Standard 1, grade 3: “Throws overhand, demonstrating three of the five critical elements of a mature pattern in nondynamic environments (closed skills), for distance and/or force.”
- Standard 3, grade 6: “Differentiates between aerobic and anaerobic capacity and between muscular strength and endurance.”
- Standard 4, high school: “Solves problems and thinks critically in physical activity or dance settings, both as an individual and in groups.”

Learning experiences in physical education should be aligned with these national standards and outcomes (and/or any applicable state standards), and instruction should be delivered in a developmentally appropriate, inclusive manner with the goal of increasing physical literacy among students. All students should be engaged regardless of ability level, and lessons should be organized in a way that maximizes student practice time and moderate to vigorous physical activity while minimizing time spent in management activities.

As in other subject areas, student learning in PE cannot be determined without systematic assessment. Assessments must align with the curriculum, and the change in test values should reflect the result of improvement in knowledge or skill. PE teachers sometimes default to a “comfort zone” of informal assessment of skill or fitness, but professionalism dictates that teachers document changes in learning. So, it is not unreasonable to expect a PE teacher to assess and document skill and cognitive learning for each unit covered—or even each class.



RESOURCES

To identify essential elements in a quality PE curriculum, SHAPE America offers a Physical Education Program Checklist at www.shapeamerica.org/standards/guidelines/upload/physical-education-program-checklist.pdf.

Try the Centers for Disease Control's district-level Physical Education Curriculum Analysis Tool at www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/pecat.

Find Out What's Happening in the Gym

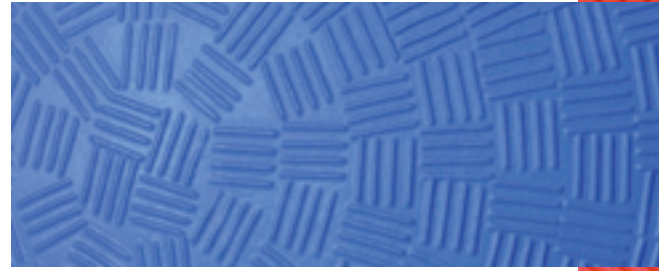
PE teachers are typically isolated in gymnasiums and have little interaction with other school personnel. As an administrator, you might need to make a special effort to learn what's being taught in the physical education curriculum and whether or not your physical education teachers are effective. The following are guidelines for quality physical education:

- You should expect to see a written curriculum when you observe, as well as structured lessons with meaningful learning experiences that align with lesson objectives and outcomes.
- You should not see long lines or disengaged students.
- You should not see full-sided games in which a few athletic students dominate play.
- When there are games, they should be modified to address the learning objectives and played in small groups so that students get more time on task.

Once you know what quality physical education looks like, you can provide more constructive feedback to your staff. This can start with a simple observation of a lesson; ask what the lesson focus was that day and whether it aligns with the district curriculum. For lesson observation, use SHAPE America's Physical Education Program Checklist or an assessment tool from your district or state.

Work Together to Enable Change

After observing a PE class, it is important to review the results with the PE teacher. At the same time, ask the physical education teacher if there are barriers or obstacles to implementing a quality program. Are class sizes too big? Is equipment sufficient for all students to be active? Do teachers have enough resources and support? To move forward, develop a plan for improvement that includes professional development workshops and memberships to state and national professional organizations.



When administrators support and encourage innovation and exploratory curriculum design, powerful integration occurs.

A successful educator collaboration starts with the alignment of units with state standards and the core curriculum. Most administrators will agree that collaborative curriculum planning can help grow successful partnerships between classroom teachers and PE teachers. Colleagues can integrate physical education activities through ELA, math, science, and social studies in interdisciplinary units of study.

Consider partnering with a regional college or university to provide collaboration and support for the program. A successful example is Belle Sherman Elementary in Ithaca, New York, which partnered with a local college to integrate Spanish-language vocabulary through movement in physical education. When administrators support and encourage innovation and exploratory curriculum design, powerful integration occurs.

The science is clear on the importance of movement for youth. Quality physical education can have a lasting impact on improving health-related fitness in students, so it is vital for administrators and physical educators to work together toward change that ensures quality physical education in the schools.

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