



Position Paper

Time Allocation for Physical Education Programs in Alberta Schools

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What follows is the draft of a position paper prepared for The Health and Physical Education Council of The Alberta Teachers' Association in September 1984.

Introduction

Regular physical education during children's school years can positively influence growth, the development of basic skills, physical fitness level, attitude toward physical activity, and other aspects of physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development. It is through the medium of movement that the physical education program provides for individual development in the psychomotor, affective, and cognitive domains. A quality of physical education program needs to be offered frequently and regularly, with enough time and intensity to achieve goals. Schools offering daily physical education programs report that their students perform just as well academically, have better motor coordination, are healthier and more fit, and have more positive attitudes toward physical activity, school, and themselves than students not involved in such a program. The school staff and parents also report strong support for daily physical education programs and recognize benefits for the students. (Note the list of reports of daily physical education programs following the references.) In recognizing physical education as an integral part of a student's total education, allot the same amount of time to physical education programs as to other core subject areas.

Position

Physical education should be an integral part of every student's education each year he or she is in school.

Physical education programs should provide students with the opportunity to become physically fit, to develop basic motor skills for optimal motor development, and to develop a positive attitude toward a wide range of physical activities. The program must be frequent, ongoing, and of sufficient intensity to achieve fitness, motor skill and social and attitudinal goals. Cognitive skills and concepts must be an integral part of physical activity programs to enhance intellectual growth.

In order for children to benefit most from a quality physical education program, time allotted for physical education must be provided on a daily basis from kindergarten to Grade 12. Furthermore:

1. The time allocated for physical education in Division One and Two should be minimum of one-half hour per day (150 minutes per week). Depending upon the abilities of the children, the nature of the activities, and the facilities, the time may be increased.

2. The time allocated for physical education in Division Three and Four should be a minimum of 45 minutes per day (225 minutes per week). Depending upon the abilities of the students, the nature of the activities, and the facilities, the time may be increased.
3. The time allotted to the physical education program should be separate from recess, free play, intramural, or extra-curricular activities.

Rationale

Martens (1982) states that Canadian interest in daily physical education programs was initiated by successful reports of the Vanves, France, project as well as conference reports that emphasized the need for more activity time for children through physical education classes. Community support for health, active lifestyles is on the increase (Kisby, 1982). The Canadian Association of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation recommends that every elementary school child experience daily physical education (1974). The Health and Physical Education Council of The Alberta Teachers' Association also endorses the concept of daily physical education for all students in all grades (GP #18, 1981).

Concerns raised about increasing the time for physical education to a daily program center around three main issues (Sinclair, (1983) :

1. How might daily physical education improve the fitness levels and performance in motor skills?
2. Will academic achievement be hindered by allotting more time to the physical education program? How might cognitive skills be enhanced?
3. What attitude changes might occur as a result of exposure to daily physical education programs?

Studies completed in a variety of schools across Canada show positive results in favor of daily physical education programs (Cote, 1980; Fischer, 1978; Gibson, Jeglum et al., 1979; LaPage, 1982; Metvier et al., 1974; Mironuck and MacKenzie; Mirtle, 1978; Quinney, 1979; Shepard et al., 1982; Sinclair et al., 1978; Wearing, 1980). These studies indicate the following:

1. An improvement in the psychomotor domain.
2. The maintenance of academic achievement levels; in some cases higher levels are achieved.
3. The development of a positive attitude toward physical activity and positive self-concept.

A review of reports of daily physical education program shows that students benefit from the increased time allotted to physical education. The decreased time in academic

studies did not affect student academic performance, and in many cases student's concentration and effort improved (Birkel, 1982; Fischer, 1978; Gibson, Jeglum et al., 1979; Mironuck and MacKenzie; Quinney, 1979; Shephard et al., 1982; Sinclair and Longstaff, 1977, 1978). Physical benefits to the students appeared in areas of fitness, coordination, body management, and confidence (Birkel, 1982; Cote, 1980; LaPage, 1982; Metivier et al., 1974; Quinney, 1979; Sinclair, 1983). Attitudes toward activity were also positively affected (Birkel, 1982; Fischer, 1978; Gibson; Jeglum et al., 1979; Mironuck and MacKenzie; Mirtle, 1978; Shephard, 1982; Sinclair, 1983; Sommerville, 1979). In many reports, the teachers found that the physical education program fostered the development of cognitive skills including such aspects as the development of organizational and planning strategies, application of concepts in problem solving, and the encouragement of imagination and creative thinking (Sinclair, 1983). Based on these positive results, daily physical education programs should receive the same time allocation as the other core subject areas.

The education of students should not be left to chance. Regular activity of a progressive nature has a positive effect on the physical aspects of growth and motor development (Sinclair, 1983). It is known that children learn motor tasks early and that there are optimal periods for learning motor skills (Zaichosky et al., 1980). Children need to work toward achieving basic skills before progressing to the use of complex combinations of skills. Without the ability to perform basic skills well, the individual will be hindered in using more complex skills. A sequential, regular, and ongoing program is essential for students to master basic movements and continue toward achieving their potential. Children are capable of performing motor skills at a higher level of competence than was previously acknowledge (Corbin, 1980; Gallahue, 1982; Zaichowsky et al., 1980). The medical profession supports daily physical education programs because of the benefits for normal structural growth and motor development (Bailey, 1973; Cuming, 1976; Goode, 1978; Kindl and Brown, 1978; Koss, 1975). Bailey (1973) indicated that children need regular exercise to develop and maintain normal bone and muscle strength.

Physical education programs can help to alleviate potential health problems. Kindl and Brown (1978) indicate that regular and vigorous activity is needed to avoid problems of childhood obesity. Goode (1976) found that with a minimum of six minutes per day of vigorous activity the cardiorespiratory endurance of children can be increased significantly. Goode (1976) also recommends that up to age 11, a minimum of nine minutes per day should be devoted to large muscle activity, and after age 11 there should be a minimum of nine minutes per day spent on a cardiovascular fitness activity. Cote (1980) found that a daily physical education period does improve the working capacity of children and that the activities should require each child to reach the maximum threshold point and maintain it for several minutes. As a result of an increased time spent on physical education, the province of Manitoba reports that its students rank 15 to 20 percent higher than the national average on fitness scores (La Page, 1982).

The amount of time needed for students to benefit most from a quality physical education program depends upon several factors. An effective daily physical education program may vary from class to class or from school to school. Shephard et al (1980)

reports the findings of an eight-year study involving daily physical education. It was found that a program offering five hours of activity a week on a daily basis did promote fitness as well as habits involving participation in vigorous activity during leisure time. The teachers involved noted overall higher grades for the children in the daily physical education program, and it was concluded that academic learning was not adversely affected (Shephard et al., 1982). Key people involved in the implementation of daily physical education programs (principals, consultants, teachers, parents) must show a strong commitment to increased time for physical activity (Sommerville, 1979).

Conclusion

Results of daily physical education projects show that there is a positive effect on the students' total education. Teacher reactions to daily physical education programs indicate that there are valuable contributions to cognitive, emotional, and motor aspects of children's development and that physical education is as important as other subject areas (Fischer, 1978; Gibson; Jeglum et al., 1979; LaPage, 1982; Mironuck and MacKenzie; Mirtle, 1978; Sinclair, 1983). With current changes in the Alberta physical education curriculum at the elementary and secondary levels and in the accompanying teacher resource materials, it is difficult to imagine that the goals of the physical education program can be achieved in anything other than a daily program. A variety of activities, sequentially planned and frequently presented, will best serve the activity needs of the students. A daily program of physical education is recommended for all Alberta children.

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