



The Florida Senate

Interim Project Report 2007-114

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Committee on Education Pre-K - 12

PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SUMMARY

Physical activity is important for children's health. There is an ongoing policy discussion as to whose responsibility it is to make sure that children are physically active. Advocates for physical education call for increased requirements for the provision of physical education classes during the school day. Other state and local agencies foster programs to increase children's physical activity outside of school and to teach children how to be responsible for their own physical activity.

Florida requires one credit of physical education in high school and encourages school districts to provide physical education in elementary and middle schools. School Wellness policies, required in 2006 by federal and state laws, must include goals for physical activity. Some school districts provide more physical education than is required by state law, and some districts have programs to encourage students to be physically active after school as well as in physical education classes.

This report does not recommend increasing statutory requirements but rather recommends that the Legislature continue to monitor the provision of physical education as the middle and high school reforms known as the A++ plan are implemented.

in a minimum of 60 minutes and up to several hours of physical activity each day.¹ In a European study of 1,732 randomly selected 9-year-old and 15-year-old students from Denmark, Estonia, and Portugal, results indicated that the recommended minimum of one-hour per day may not be enough. Interpretation of the study results indicate that "Physical activity levels should be higher than the current international guidelines of at least 1 h[our] per day of physical activity of at least moderate intensity to prevent clustering of cardiovascular disease risk factors."²

National Initiatives to Encourage Physical Activity

The inactive lifestyle of many children and the consequences for the children's health has prompted several national policy initiatives aimed at improving children's nutrition and their level of physical activity. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conducted an advertising campaign called VERB that aimed to encourage children between the ages of 9 and 13 years old to be physically active.³ The campaign encouraged students "to find their own 'verb,' whether it was playing with their friends, hitting a baseball, or jumping off a pier into a lake."⁴ The campaign began in 2002 and ended in 2006 when Congress did not renew funding for the program. An analysis of the campaign's effect on children's behavior found that the campaign "resulted in 34 percent more free-time physical activity sessions among all 9-10-year-old children, compared with children who were not aware of the campaign...."⁵

BACKGROUND

Recommended Levels of Physical Activity for Children

The health of children sets the course of their health in later years, thereby affecting their productivity as adults and the resources they and society would need to devote to their health care. Physical activity is important for children's health. The National Association for Sports and Physical Education recommends that children 5 to 12 years of age engage

¹ National Association for Sports and Physical Education. *Moving Into the Future: National Standards for Physical Education*. 2nd edition. 2004. p. 7.

² Andersen, L., Harro, M., Sardinha, L., Froberg, K., Ekelund, U., Brage, S., and Anderssen, S. "Physical Activity and Clustered Cardiovascular Risk in Children: a Cross-sectional Study (The European Youth Heart Study)." *The Lancet*. Vol 368. July 22, 2006. pp. 299-304.

³ <http://www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign/>

⁴ Parker-Pope, T. "Health Journal". *Wall Street Journal*, September 5, 2006.

⁵ Huhman, M., Potter, L. Wong, F. Banspach, S., Duke, J.,

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funds initiatives to promote healthy eating and physical activity in schools and communities. The foundation's Childhood Obesity team seeks to reach African-America, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian-Pacific Islander children living in low-income communities. The foundation also works with the Health Policy Tracking Service to track and analyze proposed legislation relating to child and adolescent nutrition, physical activity, and obesity. According to the foundation, during 2005, legislation to set guidelines for physical education or physical activity standards was introduced in 44 states, and measures were enacted in 22 states.⁶

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) periodically issues *Shape of the Nation Report* to provide information about the status of physical education in the American education system. The American Heart Association joined with NASPE in the production of the 2006 *Shape of the Nation Report*. The purpose of the report is to provide information about physical education in each state and the District of Columbia concerning time requirements; exemptions, waivers, and substitutions; class size; standards, curriculum, and instruction; student assessment and program accountability; teacher credentials; the presence of a state physical education coordinator; and the collection of information on body mass index. The 2006 *Shape of the Nation Report* argues that increased academic standards and requirements have caused schools to decrease the amount of time devoted to physical education. The report states that "the No Child Left Behind Act...of 2001, is threatening the amount of time available for physical education."⁷ The report states that physical education has become a low priority as states and schools have focused on students' academic achievement.⁸

Florida's Laws Governing Physical Education in Public Schools

Each district school board is responsible for developing a physical education program that consists of "physical

and Heitzler, C. "Effects of a Mass Media campaign to Increase Physical Activity Among Children: Year-1 Results of the VERB Campaign". *Pediatrics*. Vol 116, No. 2. August 2005. ppe-277-e284.

⁶ "Targeted Portfolio: Childhood Obesity Program Area Update". *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation 2005 Annual Report*.

⁷ National Association for Sport and Physical Education *2006 Shape of the Nation Report*. p. 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*

activities of at least a moderate intensity level and for a duration sufficient to provide a significant health benefit to students, subject to the differing capabilities of students."⁹ Each school district must have a physical education policy that describes the district's physical education program and expected program outcomes.¹⁰

Physical education is not required in elementary and middle school. The statute encourages each district school board to provide 150 minutes of physical education each week for students in kindergarten through grade 5 and 225 minutes each week for students in grades 6-8.¹¹ In high school, a student must earn one credit in physical education as a requirement for graduation.¹² Students who entered high school in 2006-2007 or earlier may meet the requirement by participating in an interscholastic sport at the junior varsity or varsity level for two full seasons and passing a competency test on personal fitness, and they may meet the requirement for one-half credit of physical education by participating in a marching band class, a physical activity class that requires participation in marching band activities, or a reserve officer training corps (ROTC) class a significant component of which is drill.

Students entering high school in 2007-2008 and thereafter will not be allowed to meet the credit requirement for physical education through other courses or athletic activities. For students entering high school in 2007-2008, the required credit in physical education must include integration of health education.

The Sunshine State Standards establish expectations for students' achievement in physical education from prekindergarten through grade 12.¹³ The standards for physical education address physical education literacy, responsible physical education behaviors, and advocating and promoting physically active lifestyles. The 2006 Legislature required the State Board of Education to establish a schedule for the periodic review of the Sunshine State Standards to ensure adequate rigor, relevance, logical student progression, and integration of reading, writing, and mathematics across all subject areas.¹⁴ The review must address the instructional requirements of different learning styles.¹⁵

⁹ s. 1003.455(1), F.S.

¹⁰ s. 1003.455(2), F.S.

¹¹ s. 1003.455(3), F.S.

¹² s. 1003.43(1)(j), F.S.

¹³ <http://www.firn.edu/doe/curric/prek12/index.html>

¹⁴ s. 6. ch. 2006-74, L.O.F.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

The standards for physical education are scheduled for review in 2007-2008.

The 2004 Legislature required the Department of Education (DOE) to report on the status of physical education instruction in the public schools and to select or develop a fitness assessment and support materials for use by school districts.¹⁶ According to the department's 2005 report on physical education:

The overall mission of fitness testing is to: 1) determine the overall fitness level of each individual student and develop individualized fitness education plans enabling the student to improve his or her fitness status, and 2) to assist physical education teachers in evaluating their present curriculum to determine if there is adequate fitness education provided to the students to improve their fitness level. Typically, fitness assessments [*sic*] programs include an instructor's guide, assessment software, and assessment report forms. The most commonly used programs in the state of Florida include the President's Challenge Physical Fitness Program and Health Related Fitness Test and the FITNESSGRAM....¹⁷

The President's Challenge,¹⁸ which encourages Americans of all ages to make being active a part of their daily lives, was developed by the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. The program assists participants to develop individualized goals and to record personal activity logs, and the program rewards participant achievements through a standardized award system. In Florida, 52 percent of schools surveyed in 2005 reported using the President's Challenge.

The FITNESSGRAM,¹⁹ a health-related fitness assessment tool, helps identify the individual fitness levels of students within the five components of health-related fitness: aerobic capacity, muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility, and body composition. The FITNESSGRAM was developed by the Cooper Institute and is sponsored by the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD). In Florida, 11 percent of schools surveyed in 2005 used the FITNESSGRAM.

The department has selected the President's Challenge Physical Fitness Program and FITNESSGRAM as the fitness measures it will recommend to school districts.

The 2004 Legislature also established an internet-based clearinghouse, funded primarily by private sources, for physical education professional development.²⁰ The DOE was required to approve a state university to develop this clearinghouse, and the department selected Florida State University. The clearinghouse will be available to teachers and to the public in October 2006.

The 2006 Legislature required school districts to submit to the DOE copies of the school wellness policies²¹ they are required to develop under the Child Nutrition and WIC reauthorization Act of 2004 (Act).²² Under the Act, all schools that participate in a program that provides free and reduced price school lunches, and/or breakfast, must establish a local wellness policy before the first day of school after June 30, 2006. The policy must include goals for physical activity.

The 2006 Legislature also:

- Required the DOE to post links on its website to resources for school districts and the public concerning classroom instruction on health-related topics, examples of school wellness policies for school districts, and other information related to school health policy and measures of school health;
- Required school districts to submit copies of their physical education policies to the DOE;
- Required all physical education programs and curricula to be reviewed by a certified physical education instructor; and
- Encouraged each district school board to provide 150 minutes of physical education each week in kindergarten through 5th grade and 225 minutes each week in grades 6th through 8th.

The requirements for high school graduation were revised by the 2006 Legislature.²³ Beginning with students entering their first year of high school in the 2007-2008 school year, high school students must earn four credits in a major area of interest and four credits in elective courses, three of which may be in a minor area of interest. The major and minor areas of interest are based on individual student academic plans developed in the middle grades. The DOE is currently

¹⁶ s. 2. ch. 2004-255, L.O.F.

¹⁷ Florida Department of Education. "Physical Education Report and Recommendations". 2005. p. 30.

¹⁸ http://www.fitness.gov/home_pres_chall.htm

¹⁹ <http://www.cooperinst.org/ftgmain.asp>

²⁰ s. 5. ch. 2004-255, L.O.F.

²¹ s. 18. ch. 2006-301, L.O.F.

²² P.L. 108-265.

²³ s. 1003.428, F.S.

establishing major and minor areas, and school districts are also developing their own, contingent upon DOE approval. If a major area is established for physical education, students who select that major could take significantly more physical education courses than the one credit that is required.

METHODOLOGY

Committee staff reviewed statutes, past legislation, Florida DOE reports, documents related to national recommendations for physical education policy, and studies pertinent to the topic of students' physical activity. Committee staff obtained data from the Florida DOE concerning participation in physical education in public schools, consulted with the department's physical education coordinator, with physical education coordinators in selected school districts, and with representatives of groups that support physical education initiatives.

FINDINGS

Over the past three years, the number of physical education classes in public schools has increased, as shown in the following chart:

**Number of Physical Education Classes
Survey 2 of 2003-04, 2004-05, 2005-06**

| Grades K-5 | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 |
|--|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Total Number of Districts Reporting Physical Education Classes | 61 | 63 | 66 |
| Number of Physical Education Classes Offered | 33,154 | 36,439 | 39,823 |
| <i>% Change from Previous Year</i> | <i>Baseline</i> | 9.9% | 9.3% |
| Grades 6-8 | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 |
| Total Number of Districts Reporting Physical Education Classes | 73 | 73 | 73 |
| Number of Physical Education Classes Offered | 12,952 | 13,843 | 14,877 |
| <i>% Change from Previous Year</i> | <i>Baseline</i> | 6.9% | 7.5% |
| Grades 9-12 | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 |
| Total Number of Districts Reporting Physical Education Classes | 72 | 72 | 73 |
| Number of Physical Education Classes Offered | 16,075 | 16,489 | 16,691 |
| <i>% Change from Previous Year</i> | <i>Baseline</i> | 2.6% | 1.2% |

Note: Based on 73 districts (67 counties, Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind, Arthur Dozier School for Boys and 4 Lab Schools)

The number of students enrolled in physical education classes increased in elementary school during the past three years, and the enrollment in physical education

classes in middle school and high school decreased during those years as shown in the chart below:

**Number of Students Enrolled in Physical Education Classes
Survey 2 of 2003-04, 2004-05, 2005-06**

| Grades K-5 | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 |
|---|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Students Enrolled in Physical Education Classes | 797,197 | 837,400 | 891,655 |
| Total Student Enrollment | 1,166,501 | 1,182,141 | 1,213,642 |
| Percent of Students in Physical Education Classes | 68.3% | 70.8% | 73.5% |
| <i>Change from Previous Year</i> | <i>Baseline</i> | <i>2.5%</i> | <i>2.6%</i> |
| Grades 6-8 | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 |
| Students Enrolled in Physical Education Classes | 314,220 | 315,914 | 300,499 |
| Total Student Enrollment | 624,450 | 627,568 | 611,821 |
| Percent of Students in Physical Education Classes | 50.3% | 50.3% | 49.1% |
| <i>Change from Previous Year</i> | <i>Baseline</i> | <i>0.0%</i> | <i>-1.2%</i> |
| Grades 9-12 | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 |
| Students Enrolled in Physical Education Classes | 261,843 | 262,679 | 260,801 |
| Total Student Enrollment | 756,141 | 778,228 | 796,418 |
| Percent of Students in Physical Education Classes | 34.6% | 33.8% | 32.7% |
| <i>Change from Previous Year</i> | <i>Baseline</i> | <i>-0.9%</i> | <i>-1.0%</i> |

Note: Based on 73 districts (67 counties, Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind, Arthur Dozier School for Boys and 4 Lab Schools)

As shown in the chart below, the average number of minutes per week per physical education class decreased in elementary school and high school over

the past 3 years, and the number of minutes per week increased in middle school.

**Average Number of Minutes per Week per Physical Education Class
Survey 2 of 2003-04, 2004-05, 2005-06**

| Grades K-5 | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 |
|---|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Total Number of Districts Reporting | 54 | 57 | 59 |
| Total Number of Schools Reporting Minutes per Week | 873 | 955 | 1034 |
| Average Number of Physical Education Class Minutes per Week | 80 | 80 | 78 |
| <i>% Change in Average Minutes from Previous Year</i> | <i>Baseline</i> | <i>0.0%</i> | <i>-2.5%</i> |
| Grades 6-8 | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 |
| Total Number of Districts Reporting | 73 | 73 | 73 |
| Total Number of Schools Reporting Minutes per Week | 861 | 896 | 887 |
| Average Number of Physical Education Class Minutes per Week | 243 | 245 | 248 |
| <i>% Change in Average Minutes from Previous Year</i> | <i>Baseline</i> | <i>0.8%</i> | <i>1.2%</i> |
| Grades 9-12 | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 |
| Total Number of Districts Reporting | 72 | 72 | 73 |
| Total Number of Schools Reporting Minutes per Week | 694 | 679 | 686 |
| Average Number of Physical Education Class Minutes per Week | 304 | 296 | 291 |
| <i>% Change in Average Minutes from Previous Year</i> | <i>Baseline</i> | <i>-2.6%</i> | <i>-1.7%</i> |

Note: Based on 73 districts (67 counties, Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind, Arthur Dozier School for Boys and 4 Lab Schools)

School District Physical Education Initiatives

School district wellness policies establish goals for physical activity. Some school districts require physical education in elementary and middle school, and some districts have formed partnerships with private businesses and local governments to implement innovative physical education programs designed to motivate students to be physically active outside of school.

The Escambia County School District’s wellness plan requires elementary schools to provide a daily 15-minute recess for all students, and requires students in grades 6 through 8 to have daily, scheduled physical education. High school students in Escambia County public schools must complete 1.5 credits in physical education—one-half credit more than is required by the state. Through grants and partnerships with agencies and organizations, Escambia County has established the Special Activities in Physical Education Program that provides equipment and teacher materials for special programs in bicycle safety, softball, bowling, skating, fitness, martial arts and golf.

The Broward County School District and a private media company have created the “Commit 2B Fit”™ program²⁴ to encourage students to improve their nutrition and increase their physical activity. In the program, all third grade students in 110 elementary schools in the district receive an agenda—a student planner—in which they write their academic activities for the day, their physical activity, and the fruits and vegetables they ate. Students assume responsibility for daily commitment to good nutrition and physical activity. Students who make a commitment to be fit receive a necklace with a charm, and they can earn a new charm every nine weeks. The Broward County Parks department will sponsor events to encourage families to use the parks for physical activity.

Miami-Dade County public schools, through a partnership with the World Olympians Association, is implementing an Olympian Education Series in middle schools and high schools. Student ambassadors from participating schools attend educational sessions with Olympic athletes who overcame a health condition that could have been perceived as a barrier. Such conditions include diabetes, eating disorders, and asthma. After attending the educational program with an Olympic athlete, student ambassadors return to their schools to tell other students what they learned. The school

district is conducting research in a program called “I Can Do It, You Can Do It” that aims to increase the physical activity of students with physical and cognitive disabilities. The research is being funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institutes of Health Foundation. Thirty senior high schools in Miami-Dade County have Wellness/Fitness centers under the Carol M. White Physical Education Program funded by the US Department of Education.

The number of minutes of physical education provided by a school district is not an adequate indicator of the district’s commitment to physical activity, as is shown by the innovative partnerships in Broward, Escambia, and Miami-Dade Counties that enhance physical education and motivate students to be physically active.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Legislature should continue to monitor school districts’ provision of physical education classes, the number of students enrolled in physical education classes, and the number of minutes per week per physical education class. The Legislature should monitor school district initiatives that enhance physical education and motivate students to be physically active.

²⁴ <http://www.commit2bfit.org/>