

# STRENGTHEN PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS



## What is physical education?

Physical education provides life skills that encourage students to be active and fit for life. It has a positive impact on students' physical, mental, and emotional health.

## What's happening currently?

Nationwide, only 27% of high school students are physically active every day for at least 60 minutes.<sup>1</sup> Despite the evidence showing that students can get many of their physical activity minutes during physical education, many students do not attend physical education.

## Physical education defined:

- A K-12 academic subject that provides standards-based curricula and instruction.
- Part of a well-rounded education.
- Designed to develop the knowledge and behaviors for physical activity, physical fitness, and motor skills in students.

The number of high school students reporting daily physical education attendance decreased significantly from **42% in 1991 to 25% in 1995**, then did not change through 2015.<sup>1</sup>

**Only 3.7%** of K-12 schools require daily physical education or its equivalent<sup>\*\*2</sup>

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION REQUIRED IN EACH GRADE<sup>†,2</sup>



## Physically active students:

- Consistently outperform less active, unfit students academically in both the short and long term,
- Demonstrate better classroom behavior,
- Demonstrate a greater ability to focus, and
- Report lower rates of absenteeism.<sup>3,4</sup>

## Students that attend physical education are:

- Approximately 2-3 times more likely to be active outside of school.<sup>5</sup>
- Almost twice as likely to continue to be active to a healthy level in adulthood.<sup>5</sup>



<sup>\*</sup>Doing any kind of physical activity that increased their heart rate and made them breathe hard some of the time during the 7 days before the survey.

<sup>\*\*</sup>Defined as physical education for students in all grades in the school for 150 minutes/week in elementary schools and 225 minutes/week in middle and high schools, for the entire school year (36 weeks).

<sup>†</sup>Among schools with students in that grade.

This brief highlights national data to describe the state of physical education in schools in the United States of America, and identifies key policies and practices that school districts and schools can put in place.

While many states require K-12 students to participate in some level of physical education, many physical education practices can be improved.



**76%** of K-12 schools allow students to be exempted from physical education requirements for one grading period or longer.<sup>‡2</sup>



**59%** of K-12 schools require all staff who teach physical education to have continuing education credits on physical education topics or instructional strategies.<sup>2</sup>



**68%** of K-12 schools allow students to be excused from one or more physical education class periods for additional instructional time, remedial work, or test preparation for other subjects.<sup>‡2</sup>



**66%** of K-12 schools prohibit staff from excluding students from all or part of physical education to punish them for bad behavior or failure to complete class work in another class.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>‡</sup> Among the 76.5% of schools with required physical education.

## What are ways to improve physical education?

### National guidance for physical education in schools

The following policies can help strengthen physical education:

- Require students to take physical education.
- Require minutes/week of participation in physical education.
- Require physical education teachers to be state certified/licensed and endorsed to teach physical education at an appropriate school level.
- Do not permit schools/districts to apply for a waiver from state physical education requirements and do not allow students to apply for an exemption from required physical education participation or credit.
- Do not permit schools/districts to allow students to substitute other activities for physical education credit.
- Prohibit schools/districts from withholding physical activity as a punishment for students.
- Prohibit schools/districts from using physical activity as a form of punishment.
- Adopt standards for physical education.

Visit SHAPE America's [Guide for Physical Education Policy](#) for more information on each policy and download the [Shape of the Nation Report](#) to see how states are doing.



### Practical strategies & resources

#### 4 ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The following components provide strategies to strengthen physical education:

##### 1 Policy and environment

Increases consistency in the delivery of physical education and creates an environment that ensures all students receive physical education with defined outcomes.

##### 2 Curriculum

Articulates a clear plan for how standards and education outcomes will be attained – just like with other academic classes.

##### 3 Appropriate instruction

Considers the diverse developmental levels of students and ensures inclusion of all students.

##### 4 Student assessment

Provides concrete evidence of student outcomes, allows teachers to reflect on effectiveness of instruction, and provides evidence of program success.

To learn more about these components, download SHAPE America's [Guidance Document: The Essential Components of Physical Education](#).

### SOURCES:

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance — United States, 2015*.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *School Health Policies and Practices Study 2014*.

<sup>3</sup> Institute of Medicine. *Educating the student body: Taking physical activity and physical education to school*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press; 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *The association between school-based physical activity, including physical education, and academic performance*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Physical Activity Council. *2017 Participation Report. The Physical Activity Council's Annual Study Tracking, Sports, Fitness, and Recreation Participation in the US; 2017*.



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Springboard to Active Schools is an initiative of the National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI) and Health Resources in Action (HRIA) through Cooperative Agreement CDC-RFA-DP16-1601 (NUTADPO03094) with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



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