



THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR HEALTH, PHYSICAL EDUCATION, RECREATION AND DANCE
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE POUR LA SANTÉ, L'ÉDUCATION PHYSIQUE, LE LOISIR ET LA DANSE

The Need for Quality Physical Education Programs in Canadian Schools

A Policy Brief prepared for the
Middle Childhood Initiative of the
National Children's Alliance



Quality Daily
Physical Education
Éducation physique
quotidienne de qualité

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The Need for Quality Daily Physical Education Programs in Canadian Schools

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Introduction - A Generation at Risk

“Physical inactivity is one of the major health issues confronting children and youth in our entire community and must be addressed as a priority.”

-Dr. Andrew Pipe, the College of Family Physicians of Canada

Children and youth are less active and less healthy today than ever before. Evidence published daily shows how our changing family cultures and our society's obsession with technology has significantly eroded traditional activity levels. Today, many Canadian children in middle childhood lead inactive lifestyles and follow poor dietary eating habits. As a result, they put themselves at risk for many serious illnesses associated with physical inactivity, including diabetes and heart disease.

The statistics are alarming:

- 57% of Canadians aged 5-17 yrs are not active enough to meet international guidelines for optimal growth and development.¹
- Children are up to 40% less active than they were 30 years ago (Ontario Medical Association, 1992).
- 90% of Canadian youth are not active enough to receive any heart-health benefits.²
- The prevalence of overweight boys and girls in Canada has increased by 92% and 57% respectively in the past 15 years.³
- Research has demonstrated that the increasing prevalence of obesity in Western societies is a result of decreased energy output rather than increased food intake.

If current trends continue, the impact on the health and well-being of Canadians will be significant. Physical activity helps prevent certain chronic conditions, including heart disease, hypertension, stroke, type II diabetes, osteoporosis, certain cancers, depression, and reduced functional ability with older age.⁴ If efforts are not undertaken to reduce these trends Canada's children can expect significantly higher rates of chronic diseases, significant increases in health care costs, and shorter life spans.

Quality physical education programs are a critical intervention to this health crisis. Quality physical education programs provide an essential opportunity for all children and youth to develop knowledge skills and attitudes (physical literacy) that they need to be physically active, both within and beyond the school environment. Regular physical activity is a key component in preventative health and helps children to guard against disease, build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints, control body weight, reduce fat, and develop efficient function of the heart and lungs. Quality physical education programs must be provided to every child in middle childhood (and in fact to all school-aged children and youth).

A Quality Physical Education program includes:

- Curricular instruction for all students (K-12) for a minimum of 150 minutes per week.
- Qualified, enthusiastic teachers.
- Well planned lessons incorporating a wide range of activities.
- A high level of participation by all students in each class.
- An emphasis on fun, enjoyment, success, fair play, self-fulfillment and personal health.
- Appropriate activities for the age and stage of each student.
- Activities which enhance cardiovascular systems, muscular strength, endurance and flexibility.
- A participation based intramural program.
- Creative and safe use of facilities and equipment.

Issue #1: Quality Daily Physical Education - Reversing the Trend

“The average high school graduate spends 12,000 hours in school but only 500 hours in physical education classes.”

-Journal of the American Medical Association, 1998

Physical education encompasses more than just physical activity. Similar to the need for children to become literate in mathematics and language, children also need to develop physical literacy. All children require the opportunity—through quality physical education experiences—to develop a language of physical movement so they know “how” and “why” to move in a variety of ways, appreciate the importance of physical activity, and choose to regularly participate in physical activity. Physically literate individuals are confident in their basic movement skills and regularly choose to participate in opportunities where physical activity is involved.

Schools play an essential role in this process. Schools have the mandate and responsibility for enhancing all aspects of a child’s growth and development and they also are the only social institution that can reach ALL Canadian children regardless of gender, culture, ability, or socio-economic background.

Ironically, despite all the supporting evidence, primary school physical education is often inhibited by low status (viewed as a “frill” subject), reduced time in the school curriculum, untrained educators, and poor quality programs.^{5,6} These programs often fail to provide children with the opportunity to develop physical competencies, fundamental movement skills, positive attitudes towards physical activity, and lifestyle habits that are integral to human well-being.

The benefits of quality physical education programs for children in middle childhood go beyond just the physical. Research and best practices have demonstrated that improvements to the school environment and student academic performance is achieved, even if curriculum time for core subjects is reduced to accommodate increased physical education time.^{7,8}

The Canadian Association of Principals has stated that children who receive an appropriate amount (at least 150 minutes per week) of physical education:

- Come to class “ready to learn” and demonstrate improved concentration, enhanced creativity, improved memory, and better task performance and problem solving skills.
- Play better with others.
- Display better individual class behaviour.

Additional benefits have also been observed for children who participate in regular physical education:

- Improved self-esteem and self-concept.⁹
- Lower levels of anxiety and stress.¹⁰
- Academic performances equal to or better than those receiving more academic curriculum time and less physical education.^{11,12}
- More positive attitudes about school, physical activity, and themselves which lead to improved attendance and reduced drop-out rates.
- A more positive school climate. Children are less aggressive and experience fewer discipline problems.¹³
- A reduced likelihood to smoke, use drugs, or consume alcohol.¹⁴

Existing Policy

Currently, only two provinces have educational policies mandating daily physical activity:

- Alberta mandates 30 minutes of daily physical activity for all students from grades 1-10
- Ontario mandates daily physical activity for students from grades K-8.

Currently, no provinces have educational policies mandating daily physical education and physical education is rarely a requirement for students in grades 10-12. Quebec policy mandates 120 minutes of weekly physical education (in French schools) for middle childhood grades and Manitoba is in the process of developing weekly mandates for grades K-4. For the remaining provinces, weekly time spent on physical education are recommendations only (not requirements), often have a significant health education component (which will further reduce the time spent in active physical education pursuits), and range from as low as 60 minutes to an acceptable 165 minutes per week depending a student's grade and province. Many schools fall short of the recommend time allotted especially where physical education specialist teachers are not present.*

Curriculum Recommendations versus Curriculum Requirements

There is a significant difference between a curriculum recommendation and a curriculum requirement. When curriculum time is only recommended, there is little or no accountability for schools or schools boards to meet the recommendation. Schools are not obligated to meet the minimum standard suggested. Based on provincially collected survey data and self-reported responses from provincial contacts the recommended times are often not achieved.

Policy Goal

To establish quality daily physical education programs in a safe environment for all Canadian children in middle childhood that will lead to lifelong physical activity habits.

Recommendation:

That key organizations with a direct influence on school policy development or provide service and support to the school system encourage school boards to establish policies that ensure:

- Quality physical education is provided to all students in middle childhood for a minimum of 150 minutes per week.
- Physical education curricula and instruction emphasize fun and help students develop mastery and self-confidence, as well as enable knowledge, attitude and skill development that will lead to lifelong physical activity habits.
- Accountability measures are established to ensure schools adhere to time and curriculum commitments.
- Adequate budgets are allocated to physical education programs and resources.
- The act of withholding physical activity or physical education time as a form of punishment is prohibited.
- Opportunities are made available for all students, regardless of gender or ability level to participate in extracurricular programs and activities that provide physical activity and the practice of physical literacy skills.
- Physical and health education are compulsory subjects.

* For more details on each province's physical education requirements, see Appendix A.

Issue # 2: Physical Education Specialists - Quality Leadership

“I like it when my teacher keeps us active—no one is left out—we have lots of fun. We do lots of different activities that keep us busy while we are learning lots of new things.”

-Female, aged 11

Qualified physical education teachers are an essential component to a quality physical education program. Effective physical education teaching requires enthusiasm for physical education and physical activity, specialized knowledge of fundamental movement patterns, movement observation skills, error detection and correction skills, an understanding of the risks associated with physical activity, unique assessment skills, and an understanding of effective ways to maintain an active and safe environment.

In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, an unfortunate trend began that saw a decline in the use of specialist physical education teachers within the Canadian school system. Currently, only 31% of teachers responsible for teaching physical education classes to students in middle childhood are physical education specialists.¹⁵ Generalist teachers often fulfill the physical education teaching role. In many cases, these teachers have received little or no training cite a lack of interest, and limited knowledge of provincial physical education curricula and how to achieve related outcomes.^{16,17,18} This results in physical education programs that lack adequate time, quality, impact, and success.

Research has also supported the importance of the physical education specialist. Primary school children taught by physical education specialists demonstrate greater achievement in most outcome measures when compared to those who are taught by non-specialists. Superior scores for specialist-taught students are evident in motor performance,¹⁹ academic achievement,²⁰ fitness levels,²¹ physical activity levels,²² and attitudes towards physical activity.²³ It has also been observed that specialists display more effective teaching behaviours than non-specialists.^{24,25,26,27,28}

Existing Policy

Quebec and the francophone school system in New Brunswick are the only Canadian provinces which mandate the use of physical education specialist teachers for all grade levels. In other provinces it is more common to use physical education specialists for grades 7-12 and generalist teachers (or sometimes a combination of specialists and generalists) to deliver physical education programs for grades K-6.*

Policy Goal

To have all children in middle childhood receive school physical education programming from a well-trained physical education specialist teacher.

Recommendation:

School boards develop hiring policies that require the use of qualified physical education personnel for teaching in middle childhood as well as grades 7-12.

* For more details on each province’s use of physical education specialist teachers, see Appendix A.

Issue #3: Facilities and Resources - Reducing Barriers

In a recent report in the European Physical Education Review titled: The state and status of physical education in schools in international context, Canada ranked near the bottom with respect to the adequacy of facilities for physical education programs. In 87% of cases, the equipment and facilities were rated as being inadequate in Canada. Only Latin American, African, and Asian countries reported higher levels of inadequate facilities than Canada.

-Presenting the Evidence: Quality Physical Education for Canadian Children and Youth

Quality middle childhood physical education programs are not just about individual behaviours or effective programming. Inadequate facilities, equipment and other resource requirements make offering quality daily physical education programs difficult or impossible for many schools.²⁹

Physical activities performed in inappropriate or inadequate facilities raise health-and-safety issues for both students and teachers. Robust physical activity in small and crowded classrooms—due to a lack of gymnasium or other appropriate space—increases the potential for injuries and damage to classroom equipment. Utilization of outside areas in disrepair due to over use or other factors—such as weather conditions—also increases injury potentials. Dancing and other high-impact activities done on linoleum-covered concrete floors (as opposed to appropriate surfaces designed to absorb shock) cause similar concerns.

Existing Policy

There are no policy controls for the development or maintenance of facilities suitable for physical education or related activities.

Policy Goal

For all Canadian schools to have access to the facilities and resources necessary to run quality physical education programs for all their students.

Recommendation:

Sufficient resources are available to enable:

- Safe student and teacher participation in physical activity and education programs.
- Quality physical education programs to all students.
- School and community sharing agreements that allow opportunities to expand sport and recreational programming.
- Safe indoor and outdoor spaces for physical activity, physical education, sports, and play.
- Adequate allocation and budgets for physical education programming needs.

Conclusion

*“There are two causes of disease, one is pathological...the other is political.”
—Rudolph Virchow*

Children should be active for at least 90 minutes nearly every day for optimum health and development in middle childhood. However, health is improved with 30 minutes of daily activity. Although it isn't the role of the school to be solely responsible for all aspects of a child's health and well-being, schools have a significant role in the development of Canada's young people and a societal obligation to provide children with knowledge and skills that will help them to lead healthy and productive lives. As a minimum, they should be required to provide children with the minimum standard of physical education and activity for health improvement. Schools are the only institution which has the potential to reach all Canadian children and all Canadian children deserve to be healthy.

As a country, we need to be sure we adopt policies that maintain and contribute to our way of life and ensure the health and well-being of our nation. Developing policies which directly contribute to providing our children with the skills and abilities to live healthy and productive lives should be a fundamental obligation.

Appendix A Provincial Ministry of Education Recommended Time Allotments

British Columbia

Ministry of Education recommended time allotments:

Physical Education				
Gr	required	Recommended min/wk	Estimated Actual min/wk	specialist
K	Y	65-75	80-150	
1	Y	148		
2	Y	148		
3	Y	148		
4	Y	148		
5	Y	148		
6	Y	148		
7	Y	140		

IRPs: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/irp.htm>,
PLOs: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/lo.html>Physical

Education is a required area of study from Kindergarten to grade 10. It is an elective subject area in grades 11 and 12. All grades from Kindergarten to 12 have provincially produced prescribed learning outcomes (PLOs) contained in curriculum documents called Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs). The Physical Education K to 7 IRP is currently being revised and is expected to be available for viewing on the Ministry of Education web site in June 2006. Optional implementation of the revised PE K to 7 IRP (2006) will begin in September 2007. Full implementation will take place in September 2009.

Alberta

Ministry of Education recommends the following:

Physical Education				
Gr	required	Recommended min/wk	Estimated Actual min/wk	specialist
K			120	
1	Y	150		
2	Y	150		
3	Y	150		
4	Y	150		
5	Y	150		
6	Y	150		
7	Y	150		

<http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/physicaleducationonline/>

Saskatchewan

Ministry of Education recommends the following:

Physical Education				
Gr	required	Recommended min/wk	Estimated Actual min/wk	specialist
K			unknown	
1	Y	150		
2	Y	150		
3	Y	150		
4	Y	150		
5	Y	150		
6	Y	150		
7	Y	150		

[Http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca](http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca)
<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/physed/physed1-5/index.html>
<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/physed6-9/index.html>

For all physical education and health education classes that are taught in French (French Immersion and Fransaskois schools), the instructional time is reduced by approximately 20%. For example, the requirements for Physical Education in grades 1-9 in French Immersion and Fransaskois schools are 120 minutes/week (not 150 minutes). Similarly, the requirements for Health Education in grades 1-9 is 60 minutes/week, not 80 minutes. This 20% reduction in instructional time is to make up for the additional instructional time devoted to French language/culture in these schools.

Manitoba

Ministry of Education recommends the following:

Physical Education				
Gr	required	Recommended min/wk	Estimated Actual min/wk	specialist
K	Y	105	unknown	
1	Y	105		
2	Y	105		
3	Y	105		
4	Y	105		
5	Y	105		
6	Y	105		
7	Y	95		

<http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/cur/physhlth/index.html>

There is to be a system-wide implementation of a new combined K-S2 PE/HE in Sept 2006. As a result of the *Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force Report* the provincial government mandated the amount of time that students in kindergarten to grade S2 should spend in phys ed/health classes. This should be implemented before the fall of 2007.

Ontario

Ministry of Education recommends the following:

Physical Education				
Gr	required	Recommended min/wk	Estimated Actual min/wk	specialist
K	Y	150	107	
1	Y	150		
2	Y	150		
3	Y	150		
4	Y	150		
5	Y	150		
6	Y	150		
7	Y	150		

[Http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary.health.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary.health.html)

Ontario is currently updating and field testing the Kindergarten program document. The new document is to be released in September 2006. HPE curriculum includes 20 minutes of daily physical activity for all grade levels as a component of the Active Participation strand however no time requirement for the entire program (local decision). New funding for specialist teachers to cover preparation time in elementary schools has resulted in an increase in the number of schools with physical education teachers (36%). But students in smaller elementary schools continue to be much less likely to have specialist physical education teachers.

Quebec

Ministry of Education recommends the following:

Physical Education				
Gr	required	Recommended min/wk	Estimated Actual min/wk	specialist
K				Y
1		120	45-60	Y
2		120		Y
3		120		Y
4		120		Y
5		120		Y
6		120		Y
7			150	Y

www.mels.gouv.qc.ca

Quebec mandates that Physical Education be taught in French schools by qualified teachers for grades K-12. On the subject selection grid, Physical Education now joins Math and First Language Education, as the only three mandatory subjects where the time allotment is specifically set.

New Brunswick

Ministry of Education recommends the following:

Physical Education				
Gr	required	Recommended min/wk	Estimated Actual min/wk	specialist
K	F - Y E - Y	E - 100	unknown	F - Y E - N
1	F - Y E - Y	F - 120 E - 100		F - Y E - N
2	F - Y E - Y	F - 120 E - 100		F - Y E - N
3	F - Y E - Y	F - 120 E - 100		F - Y E - N
4	F - Y E - Y	F - 120 E - 100		F - Y E - N
5	F - Y E - Y	F - 120 E - 100		F - Y E - N
6	F - Y E - Y	E - 150		F - Y E - Y
7	F - Y E - Y	E - 150		F - Y E - Y

New Brunswick Francophone Curriculum:
<http://www.gnb.ca/0000/publications/servped/educationphysiqueauprimaire.pdf>
 (old version - new curriculum to be posted for fall 2006)
<http://www.gnb.ca/0000/publications/servped/educationphysique9e.pdf>
<http://www.gnb.ca/0000/publications/servped/educationphysique10e.pdf>

New Brunswick Anglophone Curriculum:
<http://www.gnb.ca/0000/publications/curric/elementarypysed.pdf>
<http://www.gnb.ca/0000/publications/curric/MiddlePhysEd.pdf>

New Brunswick's education system offers students the opportunity to learn in both French and English through two parallel but separate education systems. Each linguistic sector of the Department of Education is responsible for its own curriculum and assessment. In the francophone sector Physical Education is required for all students from K-10 and is taught by PE specialists at every level. A new K-8 curriculum will be implemented province wide in the fall of 2006. In the Anglophone sector, Physical Education is mandatory from K-9.

Nova Scotia

Ministry of Education recommends the following:

Physical Education				
Gr	required	Recommended min/wk	Estimated Actual min/wk	specialist
K	Y	100-150	unknown	
1	Y	100-150		
2	Y	100-150		
3	Y	100-150		
4	Y	100-150		
5	Y	100-150		
6	Y	100-150		
7	Y			

<http://www.ednet.ns.ca>

Nova Scotia has a Combined Foundation document but separate curricula. PE P-6 - 150 minutes/week and PE 7-9 are compulsory.

Prince Edward Island

Ministry of Education recommends the following:

Physical Education				
Gr	required	Recommended min/wk	Estimated Actual min/wk	specialist
K			unknown	
1	Y	60-108		
2	Y	60-108		
3	Y	60-108		
4	Y	60-108		
5	Y	60-108		
6	Y	60-108		
7	Y	60-108		

<http://www.gov.pe.ca/educ/>

Prince Edward Island has mandatory Physical Education for grades 1 - 9 (4-6%).

Newfoundland and Labrador

Ministry of Education recommends the following:

Physical Education				
Gr	required	Recommended min/wk	Estimated Actual min/wk	specialist
K	Y	90	unknown	
1	Y	90		
2	Y	90		
3	Y	90		
4	Y	90		
5	Y	90		
6	Y	90		
7	Y	90		

<http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/k12.htm>

From K-3 PE shares a recommended 40% of instructional time between social studies, religious education, health, art and music. This generally equates to 6% recommended time be devoted to K-3 physical education. The NL Department of Education is exploring options to review the recommended times for the physical education and health curriculum. New PE K-6 curriculum was implemented in 2001, PE 7-9 in 2005 and new senior high school (gr 10 -12) in started 2002.

Northwest Territories & Nunavut

Use Alberta's Physical Education Curriculum and Guide to Implementation for grades kindergarten – 12.

Yukon

Uses British Columbia's Physical Education curriculum.

Appendix B

Groups Who Support the Implementation of Daily Physical Education Programs in Canadian Schools

The Canadian Medical Association

Passed a resolution requesting “a commitment from all provincial and territorial Ministers of Education individually, and the Council of Ministers of Education collectively, to implement a minimum requirement of 30 minutes of quality physical education on a daily basis for all students in grades Kindergarten to 12, through compulsory physical education programs.” (1998). Recently (2006), various provincial Medical Associations have re-affirmed this position by formal correspondence to school boards to urge the adoption of quality daily physical education programs.

World Health Organization

Stated that “the growing sedentary lifestyle and the changing burden of disease, the large proportion of youth, and increasing longevity throughout the world make it necessary to identify health enhancing strategies that are safe, effective and low cost—such as physical activity.” (1997)

The North American Society of Pediatric Exercise Medicine

Established guidelines for adolescents that suggest “all adolescents should be physically active daily, or nearly every day as part of their lifestyles.” (1997)

United States Surgeon General

The United States Surgeon General Report of Physical Activity and Health (1996) recommends that all schools “provide quality, preferable daily , K-12 physical education classes and hire specialists to teach them.”

The Canadian Association of Principals

Strongly support the implementation of quality daily physical education programs and urges that the concept be an integral part of every school’s program.

The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute

Reported that 87% of those polled believe that government should play a significant role in ensuring mandatory daily physical education in elementary and high schools.

The Canadian Home and School Federation

Supports the implementation of daily physical education for all grades, from kindergarten to grade 12.

Adult Canadians

In a 1998 Gallup Survey, more than 88% of adult Canadians indicated that physical education should be a required subject for all children from grades K-12.

Canadian Coalition for Quality Physical Education

- Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada
- Canadian Academy of Sports Medicine
- Canadian Association for Health Physical Education, Recreation and Dance www.cahperd.ca
- Canadian Association for School Health www.schoolfile.com/CASH.htm
- Canadian Association of Family Resources
- Canadian Association of Principals
- Canadian Child Care Federation
- Canadian Chiropractic Association www.ccachiro.org
- Canadian Colleges Athletic Association www.ccaa.ca
- Canadian Council of University Physical Education and Kinesiology Administrators
- Canadian Home and School Federation www.cnet.unb.ca/cap/partners/chsptf
- Canadian Institute of Child Health www.cich.ca
- Canadian Interuniversity Sport www.universitysport.ca
- Canadian Medical Association www.cma.ca
- Canadian Nurses Association www.cna-nurses.ca
- Canadian Paediatric Society www.cps.ca
- Canadian School Boards Association www.cdnsba.org
- Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology www.csep.ca/main.html
- Coalition for Active Living
- College of Family Physicians of Canada www.cfpc.ca
- Health Canada www.hc-sc.gc.ca
- Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada www.heartandstroke.ca
- Osteoporosis Society of Canada www.osteoporosis.ca
- ParticipACTION www.participaction.com

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