



# Physical Education

## Background

The importance of physical fitness to human health is undisputed. In a landmark 1996 report on physical activity, the U.S. Surgeon General supplied clear evidence that even moderate amounts of exercise are enough to improve health and quality of life.

Unfortunately, Americans do not embrace physically active lifestyles. Current data suggest that only one in four adults and one in five adolescents in the United States meet physical activity recommendations for aerobic and muscular fitness. Moreover, only 24% of children (6 to 17 years of age) engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.

One reason for this lack of physical activity pertains to eroding support for physical education in U.S. schools. School administrations have been quick to cut physical education from the curriculum to allot more time for standardized testing and related preparation. This is counterproductive.

When we shortchange young Americans on physical education, we should not be surprised to see a sedentary, less physically fit adult population.

Data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show the magnitude of the physical education shortchange: Fifty-two percent of high school students attend just one day of physical education per week as opposed to 30% of students attending physical education on all five days. The numbers get worse through high school. For example, results of a 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) inventory show steady declines in physical education enrollment between grades 9 and 12 from 69% of 9th grade students attending physical education classes on at least 1 day per week to 41% of 12th grade students.

A 2016 report by SHAPE America revealed that 30 states allow exemptions from physical education class time or credit and 15 states permit school districts to apply for a waiver from state physical education requirements.

Risk for expensive diseases involving the cardiovascular and metabolic systems of the body drops in conjunction with physical fitness. Of equal importance, physical education has been shown to improve academic performance and the development of sound cognitive function. Data from the U.S. National Academy of Medicine show that more active children have improved attention and perform better on standardized tests.

The public's disdain for physical education has other negative consequences for American youth. These include reduced opportunities for developing motor skills and physical strength. We also see lost opportunities for healthy socialization and team building. High-quality physical education can remediate these problems in a way that is enjoyable to students.

Government and policy leaders at all levels can be instrumental in the restoration and encouragement of physical education in American communities by:

- Backing for the Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) grant program (CFDA 84.424A) under Title IV, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which would go a long way to ensuring that well-funded physical education programs improve our national health and our physical readiness for global threats to national security.
- Sponsoring other legislation, including the Personal Health Investment Today (PHIT) Act, which will increase activity through tax incentives.
- Supporting the Promoting Physical Activity for Americans Act, which would benefit Americans with a regular report to guide physical activity efforts and help fight the growing obesity epidemic.

The above legislation has growing bipartisan support.

## ACSM Position

It is the position of the American College of Sports Medicine® (ACSM) that adequately funded physical education is critical to the development of sound bodies and minds. By prioritizing physical education in the U.S., we ensure a safe and healthy future for our country.