

Understanding the Difference

IS IT PHYSICAL EDUCATION OR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

With heightened attention on childhood obesity prevention efforts, there seems to be some confusion between the terms “physical education” and “physical activity.” Often the words are used interchangeably but they differ in important ways. Understanding the difference between the two is critical to understanding why both contribute to the development of healthy, active children. Every child in your school deserves both a quality physical education **and** physical activity program.

Physical education instructional programs offer the best opportunity to provide physical activity to all children and to teach them the skills and knowledge needed to establish and sustain an active lifestyle. California *Education Code* requires students in grades 1-6 to receive a minimum of 200 minutes of physical education instruction every 10 school days. 400 minutes every 10 school days are required for students in grades 7-12.

Based on sequence of learning, physical education should not be compared to or confused with other physical activity experiences such as recess, intramurals, or recreational endeavors.

A quality physical education program provides learning opportunities, appropriate instruction, meaningful and challenging content for all children, and should include:

- Well-designed lessons that facilitate student learning
- Maximum participation and ample practice opportunities for skill development
- Use of regular assessment to monitor and reinforce student learning
- Full inclusion of all students
- Out of school assignments that support learning and practice of learned skills
- Appropriate discipline and class management (physical activity should never be used as punishment)
- Fitness education and assessment to help children understand, improve and/or maintain their physical well-being
- Adequate equipment and facilities for all students to be active at the same time
- Opportunities to improve emerging social and cooperative skills through physical activity and gain a multi-cultural perspective

Physical activity is bodily movement of any type and may include recreational, fitness and sport activities such as jumping rope, playing soccer, lifting weights, as well as daily activities such as walking to the store, taking the stairs or raking the leaves. Similar health benefits to those received during a physical education class are possible during physical activity bouts when the participant is active at an intensity that increases heart rate and produces heavier than normal breathing. National recommendations urge school-age children accumulate at least 60 minutes and up to several hours of physical activity per day while avoiding prolonged periods of inactivity.

Opportunities to accumulate physical activity during the school day include time spent in physical education class, classroom-based movement, recess, walking or biking to school, and recreational sport and play that occurs before, during, and after school.

Parents and grandparents are urged to get active with their children. The benefits of regular physical activity include:

- Reduces the risk for overweight, diabetes and other chronic diseases
- Assists in improved academic performance
- Helps children feel better about themselves
- Reduces the risk for depression and the effects of stress
- Helps children prepare to be productive, healthy members of society and
- Improves overall quality of life.

This article was developed by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education and modified for use in California schools. See the NASPE website for additional resources related to both physical education and physical activity.

<http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/>

And the CAHPERD Website

<<http://www.cahperd.org>>