

COMPONENTS OF A QUALITY PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

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A written curriculum needs several means of support to assure that a quality physical education program is developed and delivered. This chapter addresses the components and conditions that support the implementation of a curriculum that reflects what has been outlined in Chapter 2. Twelve interrelated program components that constitute a high-performance K-12 physical education program are identified. Each component is presented through a declarative statement and a brief description of its key elements. ■

Curriculum

A high-quality physical education program is defined, guided and supported by a clearly written curriculum that is articulated for Grades K-12 and is consistent with the vision of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education's *Moving Into the Future, National Standards for Physical Education (1995)*.

Does the district have a written curriculum? Is it articulated for Grades K-12? Is the written curriculum actually being taught? Too often, curriculum in physical education is a list of activities determined by equipment or the seasons of the year. These questions and concerns can be overcome when a physical education program is driven by a comprehensive, teacher-friendly curriculum guide that provides clear direction, articulation between grades and coherence among the program's components. The curriculum should validate the importance of physical education in the schools.

A planned, ongoing and systematic physical education curriculum should define the overarching philosophy and goals of the program; present the key objectives or outcomes for each grade level or course; provide illustrative examples, tasks and/or activities; list available resources for implementing the curriculum; and detail how the outcomes or objectives will be assessed. The curriculum should determine the selection of instructional units and learning experiences as it guides instruction, allowing all students to meet the standards set in physical education. In addition, the K-12 curriculum should assure smooth transitions and progression from grade to grade. In short, written curriculum guides should provide teachers and others with clear answers to the questions: What exactly are my students expected to learn this year? What skills, concepts and understandings should I be held accountable for teaching this year?

Suggestions for creating such a curriculum guide are presented in Chapter 4. ■

Skilled Educators

A high-quality physical education program is taught by trained professionals certified in physical education, who serve as positive role models of personal health, fitness, skill and the enjoyment of participating in physical activity.

Skilled instruction is critical to the delivery of a quality program in physical education for all students. It is imperative that those developing the skills and concepts in children have the knowledge, teaching methods and instructional strategies specific to the discipline. What is expected of a beginning teacher in physical education is articulated in the *National Standards for Beginning Physical Education Teachers*, developed in 1995 by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) and adapted as "Professional Teaching Standards for Physical Education in Connecticut" (see Appendix H). The Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program uses these standards, along with *Connecticut's Common Core of Teaching (1999)* in its two-year induction program of support and assessment. The certification and professional development process in Connecticut requires some of the highest standards in the nation for the development of skilled educators and quality instruction in our schools.

Physical education is frequently identified as a "special" subject. This label is appropriate when one looks at the high degree of "specialized" physical skill, understanding and knowledge that physical education teachers must be able to model, assist in developing and assess in terms of student mastery. The physical educator should be considered an expert and be consulted when physical activities are being used in other content areas or developed for use outside the regularly scheduled physical education environment.

In Connecticut, certified physical education teachers deliver the majority of instruction in their discipline. Teachers holding certification in early childhood or elementary education are not authorized to be sole providers of physical education. The intent of the "sole provider" language in the certification regulations for nonspecialist teachers is to ensure that students receive substantive instruction in these curriculum areas. Put another way, skilled (certified specialist) educators play a significant role in helping students master important subjects, both as providers of instruction and as expert partners with other teachers who incorporate physical education into their teaching. (Certification regulations are discussed further in Appendix F.) ■

Facilities and Materials

A high-quality physical education program provides sufficient equipment and an adequate facility to allow each student to benefit from maximum participation and optimal practice and learning time to accomplish the goals of the curriculum.

One of the most important considerations is the instructional facility itself. It is recommended that a school have an appropriate facility designed primarily for physical education instruction, ideally a gymnasium and outdoor instructional area. Instructional facilities for physical education vary, and often serve many purposes, such as “cafeteriums”. In shared facilities, care must be taken to assure that scheduling does not disrupt the instructional needs of physical education. It is vital that the facility meet safety needs and have adequate space for the number of students and the variety of activities defined in the curriculum. (See Appendix G for more specific information on space and facility planning.)

Equipment used in the delivery of the physical education curriculum should be chosen based on the activities used to meet program objectives. Equipment should not determine the content or focus upon which the curriculum is built. Physical educators should be creative and utilize a variety of equipment when students are developing manipulative skills. Care should be taken to assure that equipment is developmentally appropriate for the age, body size and skill level of the students. To allow for maximum participation, there should be an adequate amount of equipment for each specific activity, e.g., when working with manipulatives, each student should have his or her own piece of equipment to avoid down time. Physical educators should keep up-to-date inventories and safety and maintenance records of all equipment.

The budget for both equipment and facilities should be sufficient to support a quality program for the number of students served. Physical educators need to be informed of and involved in the budget process at both the district and buildings levels. Inventories can ease the process for cycling and replacing equipment. Expenses can be quite large due to the size and amount of equipment needed in physical education. Leadership should be prepared to present and defend budget costs. Parent organizations, along with Safe and Drug Free School funds, have supplemented the building of adventure elements in many schools. Often, facility planning and large equipment expenses have been shared with local park and recreation organizations.■

Instructional Technology

A high-quality physical education program assures that technological advances are infused as part of the regular teaching and learning process.

The use of technology to explore fitness concepts permits students to personalize their application of the objectives of the curriculum. For example, data can be gathered from heart rate monitors and then used in an integrated lesson as the rate is plotted, analyzed and used to make decisions about an individual’s health. Computer programs can analyze and provide feedback on nutrition and diet and their effect on an individual’s physical condition. Computers also can be used to store student work, including digitized images in electronic portfolios. Video cameras can assist students in analyzing and improving their own performance. Technology can assist in portfolio assessment and performance assessment when handling the large numbers of students for whom teachers in physical education are responsible. Technology also can be used to individualize instruction and transform the physical education classroom into an exciting personal fitness and motor development center. Websites for physical education and related areas are continually being developed.■

Scheduling: Time and Class Size

A well-developed physical education program strives for quality daily physical education while meeting the minimum recommended time ranges. The range of teaching responsibilities and realistic class sizes allow for a positive instructional environment and greater student achievement.

As stated in Chapter 1, physical educators and the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance believe that, “every student in our nation’s schools, from kindergarten through Grade 12 should be required to participate in quality, daily physical education,” (NASPE, 1990). The following time frames are recommended for physical education in Connecticut:

- At the early elementary level, a minimum range of 60-100 minutes per week, increasing to between 80 and 120 minutes for students in the intermediate grades.
- In middle schools, students should receive a minimum of three class periods comparable in length to other content areas.

- High school students must have at a minimum the time needed to meet the one-credit state graduation requirement. A district may decide, as many have, to set graduation requirements higher than the state requirement. It is recommended when determining the configuration for high schools that districts provide physical education for all students in each year of their high school experience.

Time constraints created by scheduling and budgetary and instructional mandate issues effect all subject areas. Physical education has some very specific concerns that must be addressed. The scheduling issue and the struggle for time can cause inappropriately large physical education classes. Physical educators should be involved in the scheduling process to assure that physical education is not scheduled around other areas of the curriculum. Schools are constantly investigating scheduling options to maximize instruction and learning time. The effect of block scheduling on physical education is just beginning to be investigated. Many questions have been raised about whether the benefit of longer class periods outweighs the decrease in frequency that physical education is offered. Time is a critical variable in assuring a high-quality program. If physical education is going to allow students to develop and maintain an appropriate level of physical fitness and build good habits for the future, then the frequency and concentrated involvement in physical activity necessary for the development of skills and concepts must be considered. Evidence indicates that active children choose active lifestyles later in life (Raitakari et al., 1994).

Schools also should remain aware of the Surgeon General's July 1996 report on physical activity, which outlines the benefits of 30 minutes of daily physical activity. Most adults acknowledge that they benefit from an exercise break during the day. Studies have shown that companies with fitness and health promotion programs have better attendance rates, more job satisfaction and higher performance levels (Opatz, 1994).

Adequate time should be scheduled to allow teachers and students to meet the goals of the curriculum. Physical activities that might be the choice of individual children during recess and at other times during the day are supportive of the overall goal for physical activity, but should not take the place of or be a substitute for physical education. Extracurricular offerings, such as intramural and interscholastic athletics, also should be included as options that support increased physical activity and opportunities for applying the skills and knowledge developed in physical education. Such offerings provide a place for students to apply the skills they have learned in class, but should not be a substitute for physical education. It is also expected that the physical education program can be richly supported through

interdisciplinary and integrated tasks and units with other content areas, e.g., the arts (dance) and health education.

Physical education classes should be assigned the same number of students as classes in other content areas. An acceptable range should be established after considering the student population, including developmental levels, safety concerns, the size of instructional space, the activities in the curriculum, student/teacher ratios and support staff.■

Inclusion

A high-quality physical education program assures experiences and instructional strategies that allow for the inclusion of all students, regardless of ability or disability, gender, race or ethnicity.

Physical educators must make the commitment to serve and meet the needs of all students. All persons have an equal right to be included to the greatest extent possible and have the opportunities to reach their potential. Materials, resources, activities and strategies should provide alternatives that accommodate individuals with cognitive, physical, behavioral and sensory impairments.

Inclusion also encompasses the issues of Title IX and gender equity. Females traditionally have had fewer opportunities and less encouragement than males to be physically active. The basic principles of Title IX provide that physical education classes may not be conducted separately, nor can participation be required or refused on the basis of sex. Students may be grouped by ability and may be separated by gender within classes for sports which involve bodily contact as the major activity. Both inclusion and Title IX are more fully covered in Chapter 5 of this document as pertinent issues for physical education.■

Curricular Connections

A high-quality physical education program regularly makes connections within the discipline of physical education and builds the interdisciplinary links between physical education and other subject areas and programs so that students are able to make and see these connections.

A high-quality physical education program encompasses a wide scope of offerings and experiences for students. These may include team and individual activities; physical fitness; rhythms and dance; cooperative activities; aquatics; gymnastics; and outdoor and challenge pursuits. Physical educators must assist in making the connections among the various offerings in order that students understand the purpose and impact these

experiences have on the overall goal of lifetime physical activity. For example, physical fitness is an important component of physical education but, alone, does not make up a quality program. If physical educators use problem solving and essential questions to guide student thinking, students may be led to links with other content areas.

Physical education is one significant piece of a coordinated school health program. Coordinated school health programming coordinates the different strategies and topics that focus on behaviors contributing to the health, safety and well-being of students, staff and families in the school. Connections are made between physical education, health education, health services, counseling, guidance and mental health services, school nutrition service, healthy school environment, family and community involvement and staff health promotion. It is through the combined efforts of these programs and services that one promotes health and wellness.

Connections to the physical education discipline reach far beyond health. Interdisciplinary units have linked movement to social studies, the arts, science and math. This has resulted in positive responses from students, who see the relationships to real-world experiences and the benefits to those whose learning styles are more kinesthetic.

Physical education can help in the development of problem-solving skills that are necessary in the interdisciplinary section of the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT). Physical educators should include rich, challenging activities that require students to analyze, synthesize and evaluate to prepare students for the CAPT. Schools that have moved to interdisciplinary units and team approaches need to assure that physical education teachers are included in the cooperative planning, instruction and evaluation. Teachers in other disciplines gain a new respect for physical educators and their content, and vice versa, when all are given an opportunity to plan and instruct through interdisciplinary units.■

Student Assessment

A high-quality physical education program has a coherent system of assessment that is closely aligned with curricular and instructional goals and promotes the ongoing improvement of instruction.

What is assessed and how it is assessed communicates most clearly what is valued. If the vision of a thinking, reasoning and problem-solving curriculum orientation is to become a reality, our entire system of assessment and how we hold students accountable must shift. Assessment should be a continuous, formative process. Scores on a single test at the end of a unit will not drive the curricular and instructional changes that are needed. Assessment must provide evidence of what stu-

dents have learned and are able to do. Physical educators need to formalize the process of student assessment beyond subjective observation. This process must include the documentation of student achievement, which is assessed according to specific criteria. Through this methodology, the emphasis becomes *quality*, not *quantity*, in the examination of *process*, not just *product*. Physical educators must be prepared to use this evidence to answer questions from parents and students such as, "How could my child get a C in physical education?" Through assessment procedures, guided by learning objectives, student learning and growth should be revealed. A high-quality physical education program must incorporate assessments of demonstrated accomplishments, using performances, projects and portfolios. Assessment should be based on the high standards and clear criteria for expected performance that have been defined in the objectives of the curriculum. The entire system of accountability needs to shift to the evaluation of student learning that assesses students against high standards and clear criteria for expected performance. If there is no assessment in physical education, there is no accountability for student learning.■

Professional Interaction

A high-quality physical education program assures that teachers have ample time and diverse mechanisms with which to interact professionally on substantive matters of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

The professional isolation of teachers is frequently cited as the most serious impediment to curricular and instructional improvement. For physical education instructors this is even more evident, since they are often teaching in an area isolated from the rest of the school. In many situations, a physical education teacher can be the only representative of his or her discipline on the staff. Far too often teachers' frames of reference are focused on how they were taught, rather than constructive reflection on problems and possible solutions. Cooperatively seeking solutions to shared concerns can be more effective than attempting to address problems in isolation. The mentoring relationships that are developed for beginning teachers should be expanded and continued throughout the careers of physical educators.

The concept of teaming and increased use of interdisciplinary units has expanded both the opportunity and need for teacher interaction. Solutions should be sought to work beyond the scheduling constraints which often exclude the physical educator. The nature of physical education allows the teacher to bring different insights to interdisciplinary offerings. The fact that physical educators often see a large portion of the students makes them excellent resources in groups such as "student assistance teams".

Physical educators, like all educators, need to be working to improve the quality of programs and instruction. This requires increased opportunities for professional interaction, which can and must take many forms: peer observations; team-teaching; formal and informal opportunities for sharing; videotaping instruction; issue-focused faculty meeting discussions; action teams; course committees and common planning time. Through these opportunities school faculties and physical education departments can become dynamic communities of learners rather than just assortments of teachers and students working in the same building. As much as physical educators need to communicate with each other, they also need to collaborate with representatives of other departments in the school, educating each other about their disciplines. This will enhance the critical sharing of ideas, experiences and knowledge that are the hallmarks of professional collaboration and growth. ■

Professional Development

A high-quality physical education program is supported by a comprehensive program of professional development that focuses on issues of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; recognizes the importance of ongoing professional growth; and provides opportunities to participate in conferences, seminars and institutes.

Physical educators need to be aware of the programs, strategies, resources and materials that are available for use in implementing changes in curriculum, instruction and assessment. Through ongoing professional development, including opportunities to attend conferences and seminars, access to professional journals, and encouragement to visit colleagues, teachers will become aware of the paths to change and improvement.

Physical educators need to be included in the professional development that crosses disciplines, as well as to have opportunities which are relevant to the content and teaching and learning process in physical education. The small numbers of physical educators on staff may make this a challenge. District personnel who oversee professional development often do not understand and cannot communicate content-specific needs. Physical educators must speak up and become involved in the planning and providing of professional development offerings. Because physical educators often are left with few options, regional opportunities and consortium groups with neighboring towns are two ways of working past this roadblock and also increasing the opportunity for communication and collaboration with other professionals. Opportunities for professional development through mentoring and support during the Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program need to be expanded as teachers advance in their careers. Time

is a scarce but essential resource that is needed when providing teachers with substantive opportunities for professional development.

For these reasons, an ongoing program of professional development for physical educators that is responsive to identified instructional needs and that is adequately funded and supported must be in place in every school and district. Professional development should be aligned with school and district goals and address trends in education and in the content area. Physical educators, like all other educators, should accept responsibility and strive for continuous self-evaluation and professional growth. ■

Supervision and Evaluation

A high-quality physical education program includes a plan for professional supervision and evaluation that sets high standards of professional performance and is supported by programs and policies to assure that these standards are met.

Just as the methods and techniques of student assessment must change to account for measuring newer and broader outcomes, so too must methods and techniques of teacher evaluation change to account for different definitions of productivity and effectiveness. The use of professional standards that define what is valued in the teaching and learning of physical education creates a vision of practice for the field and encourages and supports teacher growth while promoting improved student learning. At the national level, what is expected of a beginning teacher in physical education has been defined by the *National Standards for Beginning Physical Education Teachers*, developed in 1995 by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE). Connecticut has adapted the national document as *Professional Teaching Standards for Physical Education in Connecticut* (see Appendix H). These two documents, together with *Connecticut's Common Core of Teaching* (1999), have set standards for physical educators. Teachers should be held accountable for professional standards, which identify what they need to know and be able to do.

The professional evaluation that supports a high-quality physical education program needs to be broadened in scope and deepened in rigor. Administrators and supervisors must not only have training in the assessment process but also understand the complexities of the discipline and its teaching scenarios. Physical educators need to be involved in the process of evaluation, from the setting of goals to being able to personally reflect on what occurs in the teaching and learning process in their classrooms. The evaluation system should incorporate the development and peer review of professional performance portfolios, including the analysis of student achievement. ■

Resource Personnel and Leadership

A high-quality physical education program assigns the responsibility for the ongoing implementation and improvement of the program to qualified coordinators, supervisors, resource personnel and/or department chairpersons in order to provide support, coordination, supervision and leadership.

Each of the program components suggests that a high-quality K-12 physical education program incorporates a complex web of ongoing activity, change and support. The effectiveness and vitality of a district's K-12 physical education program depends heavily on the assignment of responsibility for program oversight and coordination. One or more individuals who are qualified for the leadership role in physical education should be assigned this responsibility. All too often, when program leadership and responsibility for ongoing implementation and improvement are not vested in one or more individuals, the focus on program quality and improvement falls through the cracks and fragments under the weight of other priorities.

High-quality programs require that a vision of reform is created, nurtured and pursued; teachers are kept abreast of changes and aware of professional development opportunities; and, curricular and instructional improvement are ongoing processes. It is imperative that

school administrators support and share the view that physical education is an essential part of the total curriculum.■

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