

# SHAPE OF THE NATION REPORT

Conducted by:

**National Association for Sport and Physical Education  
2001**

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

Since 1987 the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) has been conducting the *Shape of the Nation Report* every few years to summarize for the profession and the public information regarding the status of physical education in the American educational system. The challenge of the 1987 survey continues in this latest survey. That is typically, the state mandates are broad and general, leaving many specifics open to interpretation.

Several facts must be considered when interpreting the results. 1) There is no federal law that requires physical education to be provided to students in the American education system, nor any incentives for offering physical education programs. 2) States may set some general or minimum requirements, but individual school districts provide specific direction and may exceed the minimum recommendations 3) Many states delegate responsibility for all content taught in schools to the local school districts.

This latest survey as well as the 1997 survey report that most states do not live up to the calls from the landmark 1996 Surgeon General's Report, *Physical Activity and Health*, and *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Guidelines for Schools and Community Programs to Promote Lifelong Physical Activity Among Young People*, which both recommend the requiring of daily physical education for all students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

The importance of physical education in promoting the health of young people has been a part of the health objectives for the nation since 1990. *Healthy People 2010* include three objectives related to school physical education:

- 22-8 Increase the proportion of the nation's public and private schools that require daily physical education for all students.
- 22-9 Increase the proportion of adolescents who participate in daily school physical education.
- 22-10 Increase the proportion of adolescents who spend at least 50 percent of school physical education class time being physically active.

In addition, the most recent call for daily physical education came in November 2000 in the *Report to the President: Promoting Better Health for Young People through Physical Activity and Sports*. Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala and Education Secretary Richard Riley wrote, "Our nation's young people are, in large measure, inactive, unfit, and increasingly overweight. This report should stimulate action to make sure that daily physical activity for young people becomes the norm in our nation."

The 2000 *Shape of the Nation Report* also includes important related information from the latest *School Health Policies and Programs Study* (SHPPS) 2000 and the *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance* (1999). The development of this report was made possible by a grant from the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD).

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the *Shape of the Nation Report* is to determine the:

- 1) mandate and availability for physical education programs at each level (elementary, middle and high school) in each state
- 2) qualifications of those teaching physical education
- 3) existence of curricular standards for physical education
- 4) class size and
- 5) accountability for student achievement.

Through this report, NASPE brings attention to the importance of quality, daily physical education programs for all school age children by providing information about the current status of physical education in each state. The status of physical education is particularly relevant at this time of growing concern about the reduced levels of physical activity and increased levels of obesity, diabetes and related health problems for all age groups. Achieving optimal health status is closely linked to success in all life domains, and a comprehensive education that addresses mental, emotional, spiritual and physical elements is essential. Physical education is a key component of such an education.

## **Methodology**

During the spring of 2001 NASPE sent a questionnaire to the physical education directors/consultants in all 50 state Departments of Education (SDE) and the District of Columbia. The survey requested information about the mandate for physical education at the elementary, middle and high school levels, state standards, assessment of student learning, acceptance of substitutions for physical education, time allocations, licensing requirements for teachers of physical education, current issues and concerns. Follow up phone calls achieved complete response by all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Dr. Marian Kneer, a NASPE Past President, reviewed and compiled the information provided. The summary information compiled for each state was returned to the respective SDE representatives for confirmation of content.

## **Results**

Fifteen years after the U.S. Congress passed Resolution 97 encouraging state and local governments and local educational agencies to provide high quality daily physical education programs for all children in kindergarten through grade 12, and 10 years after Goals 2000 called for inclusion of physical education as an integral component of all school programs, little progress has been made. Most states are not living up to recommendations of multiple reports and recommendations from the federal government and other national organizations including the Surgeon General's Report, *Physical Activity and Health*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention *Guidelines for Schools and Community Programs to Promote Lifelong Physical Activity Among Young People*, American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the National Education Association (NEA) to require physical education for all students in kindergarten

through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. That is the major finding of the *Shape of the Nation Report*, as conducted by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE). While this does not represent dramatic change from the previous survey, it does indicate that most states, in the face of the growing crisis in childhood obesity, Type II diabetes and of increasing sedentary lifestyles, have taken no action to provide education about the physical dimension of individuals.

Since the last report there has been a greater emphasis on standards-based reform. The establishment of standards for what “students shall know and be able to do” has occurred across most states and in most cases has or will include physical education. However, there has been significant pressure on school leaders to demonstrate increased achievement of recently developed standards in academic areas particularly reading and math. As states develop or select standardized tests to hold schools and students accountable, content that is not tested becomes lower in priority. Several states have called for standards for learning in physical education but do not hold students or schools accountable for achievement of the standards. However, in several states, state tests are being developed for health and physical education (California, Kentucky, Maine, Missouri, New York, South Carolina and Vermont).

Another general pattern with differential impact on physical education is local control of education. States that establish standards or very broad guidelines for curriculum content defer specific decisions regarding time, allocations, class size and accountability for physical education to local school districts or even schools. This results in very diverse patterns of delivery for physical education and some other subject areas such as music and art.

Survey highlights include:

### **1) Mandate and Availability for Physical Education**

Only two states (Colorado and South Dakota) do not have some kind of mandate for physical education. However, in many states the legislated mandate requires only that physical education be provided and local districts provide the content and format guidelines.

Even in Colorado (now a local control state) and South Dakota where no mandates exist, most districts provide for some physical education. Mississippi has expanded the requirements for physical education since the last survey and Oklahoma has shifted from specific time requirements to a standards based requirement.

As reported in 1997, Illinois is still the only state that requires daily physical education for all students, K-12. However, in Illinois a waiver program has been passed allowing exemption from the mandate and there are no time or content guidelines for the mandate. Alabama requires daily physical education for all students K-8.

At the elementary school level, state mandated requirements for physical education time range from 30 minutes a week to 150 minutes per week (NASPE recommends 150 minutes per week).

At the middle school level, physical education time requirements range from 80 minutes a week to 275 minutes per week (NASPE recommends 225 minutes per week).

The majority of high school students take physical education for only one year between 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. The time requirements range from no time specified to 225 minutes a week (NASPE recommends 225 minutes per week).

One year/unit of physical education is required in high school (9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades) by 18 states (Alabama, Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, South Carolina and West Virginia).

Two units or two years are required in six states (California, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, Virginia and Washington, and the District of Columbia. Other requirements range from none (Colorado, Oklahoma and South Dakota); to ½ unit (Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan and Ohio); 1½ units (Louisiana, Texas, Utah, Vermont and Wisconsin) and 4 units (Illinois and New Jersey).

The graduation requirements for the remaining 12 states are set by the local school districts.

Sixty percent of the states (29) plus the District of Columbia give a grade for physical education and include it in the grade point average. Georgia, Kansas and New Hampshire do not include the physical education grade in the grade point average. In the remainder of the states (18) local school districts determine if grades are included in the students' grade point average.

Forty-two percent of the states (21) do not allow any substitutions for instructional physical education.

Fifty-eight percent of the states (27) allow substitutions for high school physical education. The justification of substitution may be due to: medical reasons, religious, participation in varsity athletics, ROTC and marching band or other special activities. States that do not require high school physical education (Colorado, Oklahoma, and South Dakota) can not/do not grant substitutions.

## **2. Qualifications of Those Teaching Physical Education**

The states of Delaware, Illinois, Michigan, and Missouri require that only certified physical education specialists teach elementary school physical education.

Only classroom teachers teach elementary school physical education in Hawaii.

In 45 states, certified physical education specialists are recommended but classroom teachers teach elementary school physical education.

In 38 states certified physical education specialists are required to teach physical education at the middle school level.

In 11 states (Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Louisiana, Nevada, New Jersey, Ohio and South Dakota) teachers certified in other areas are allowed to teach middle school physical education.

Certified physical education specialists are required to teach physical education at the high school level in 47 states.

Teachers with other or no certification are permitted to teach physical education at the high school level in two states (Arizona and Hawaii).

Only six states (Arizona, Delaware, Hawaii, Louisiana, New Mexico and New Jersey) do not require continuing education in order to maintain teacher licensure. In some states the individual school districts either set or may add to the state requirement for maintaining teacher certification. The majority of states require five or six credit hours every five or six years to maintain teacher certification in physical education or any other teacher licensure.

### **3. Existence of Curricular Standards**

Forty-four states indicate that there are or are in development state standards for physical education content. There are no specific state standards for physical education in seven states (Alaska, Idaho, Iowa, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont). Of the states having standards for physical education, over 80 percent of them are based on NASPE's National Standards for Physical Education.

### **4. Class Size**

Across all education levels it seems that nearly 80 percent of the states allow a teacher student ratio of 1:30 in physical education class. Class size for physical education should be the same as for any other subject (high school like ratio). Large classes put students at greater risk of injury as well as reduce learning and teacher feedback. Nearly 25 percent of the states report no regulations for class size.

### **5. Accountability for Student Achievement**

Physical education is being assessed by state approved assessment in five states (Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York and West Virginia) and the District of Columbia, and assessments are being developed and instituted in Maine, Missouri and South Carolina.

Physical fitness is being assessed in seven states (California, Connecticut, Kentucky, Missouri, New York, Ohio and West Virginia) and the District of Columbia, and will be assessed in Maine, New Jersey and South Carolina soon.

### **Comments**

Several states expressed very positive signs of physical education improvement in their states. Others expressed concerns over the physical condition of their students and the fact that students can avoid physical education by participating in other courses, activities, etc. One state expressed concern that the requirement for physical education may be dropped. Most believed that teachers, parents and policymakers need to get more involved at all levels to ensure positive physical education programs for all students in every state in the future.

## **Recommendations for Action**

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) wants to remind America that “Physically active, healthy kids learn better!” Elementary school students should have a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate and vigorous activity every day while middle and high school students should have a minimum of 30 minutes every day.

To achieve that level of activity, NASPE recommends that schools across the country make physical education instruction the cornerstone of a systematic physical activity promotion in school that also includes recess, after-school clubs and intramurals as well as competitive athletics. The co-curricular opportunities must be designed to attract all students especially those not interested in traditional athletic programs.

Physical education is a planned instructional program with specific objectives. An essential part of the total curriculum, physical education programs increase the physical competence, health-related fitness, self-responsibility and enjoyment of physical activity for all students so that they can establish physical activity as a natural part of everyday life.

For the elementary school students, recess provides an opportunity for needed physical activity. Unstructured time also contributes to creativity, cooperation, and learning about social interaction. Children learn how to cooperate, compete constructively, assume leader/follower roles and resolve conflicts by interacting in play. Play is an essential element of children’s social development.

In addition to providing quality physical education programs and recess, NASPE recommends that schools, after care, and recreation programs provide varied programs to meet physical activity interests of all children. Coaches and staff need to receive the specialized training needed to provide developmentally appropriate, safe, and enjoyable activities.

Parents need to become more effective advocates for quality physical education programs and physical activities and communities need to develop and promote the use of safe, well-maintained and close-to-home sidewalks, bike paths, trails and recreation facilities. Most of all, parents need to set a good example by being active themselves.

In summary, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) recommends the following:

1. All students, including those with special needs, receive quality physical education as an integral part of K-12 education.
2. Elementary school children receive a minimum of 150 minutes per week of instruction in physical education; middle and high school students receive a minimum of 225 minutes per week of instruction in physical education.
3. All states develop standards for physical education that reflect the National Standards (NASPE, 1995).
4. All states set minimum standards of achievement in physical education.
5. Meeting standards in physical education be a requirement for graduation.
6. Other courses and activities that include physical activity should not be substituted for instructional physical education.
7. Physical activity needs to be incorporated into the school day in addition to physical education through recess at the elementary level, physical activity breaks, physical activity clubs, special Family Fitness events, etc.
8. Teachers who are specially prepared and licensed in physical education deliver physical education instruction at all levels.

9. Parents need to set a good example by being active themselves and becoming more effective advocates for quality physical education.
10. Communities need to develop and promote the use of safe, well-maintained and close-to-home sidewalks, bike paths, trails and recreation facilities.

Copies of the complete *Shape of the Nation Report* with state descriptions may be ordered by calling 1-800-321-0789. The cost is \$10 (\$5 for NASPE/AAHPERD members), stock no. 304-10255.