

Active Living - Physical Education for the 21st Century
A Position Paper of the Health and Physical Education Council
of The Alberta Teachers' Association

INTRODUCTION

Physical Activity—A New View

The need for children and youth to engage in regular physical activity as one of the prerequisites for achieving optimum health and quality of life has long been recognized. The recently released *A Report of the Surgeon General - Physical Activity and Health, 1996* provides a new level of support and legitimacy to this need. It focuses on the positive health outcomes of moderate physical activity and the dangerous trends of inactivity amongst children and youth. The report brings together what has been learned about physical activity and health from decades of research and presents major findings that support a new view of physical activity:

- people who are usually inactive can improve their health and well being by becoming even moderately active on a regular basis;
- physical activity need not be strenuous to achieve health benefits, and
- greater health benefits can be achieved by increasing the amount (duration, frequency or intensity) of physical activity.

The research cited in the surgeon general's report has shown that regular physical activity improves health in the following ways:

- helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints
- helps control weight
- reduces the risk of developing high blood pressure
- helps reduce blood pressure in people who already have high blood pressure
- reduces the risk of dying from heart disease
- reduces the risk of developing diabetes
- reduces the risk of dying prematurely
- reduces the risk of colon cancer
- reduces feelings of depression and anxiety
- promotes psychological well being.

Physical Activity—A Generation at Risk

Current health and activity trends of Canadian children suggest that there is significant cause for concern. Modern technology reduces energy expenditure through the production of devices and services designed to make physical labor unnecessary. Canadian children are choosing to watch television, surf the internet and play video games instead of pursuing more active leisure pursuits. Consequently, the habitual activity level of our children may be insufficient to provide the health protection that was inherent in the lifestyle of previous generations. The result of this inactive behavior is a significant increase in childhood obesity and an increase in the prevalence of cardiovascular disease risk factors in Canadian children and youth. Four in ten Canadian children have at least one risk factor for heart disease, reduced fitness due to an inactive lifestyle, and sixty per cent of Canadian youth do not meet fitness standards (*CAHPERD/Active Living Canada*). Our nation's children and youth are not sufficiently active and there is emerging

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evidence that these sedentary habits will continue into adulthood (*A Report of the Surgeon General - Physical Activity and Health, 1996*). Insofar as children and youth are concerned, there is a sense of urgency surrounding the promotion of active, healthy lifestyles.

Physical Education—Reversing the Trend

One of the promising ways to help children and youth include more physical activity in their daily lives is through the provision of well-designed, quality physical education programs based on balanced curriculum that

- a) provides continuous progress from kindergarten to grade 12,
- b) focuses on active living,
- c) provides opportunities for daily physical activity
- d) is learner-centred, and
- e) is success based.

The Alberta Teachers' Association Long-Range Policy 1.A.51 states "A compulsory health and daily physical education program should exist from K through 12". This policy lends support to those elements outlined above. Furthermore, enhanced learning, better concentration, improved self-control and confidence, improvements in fitness and the development of positive attitudes towards lifelong participation in physical activity are well documented benefits of quality physical education programs in Canadian schools.

However, despite widespread acceptance of the above objectives and the evidence that supports the health, learning and quality-of-life benefits of activity, physical education is not seen as a priority in most Canadian schools. Although it is generally believed that existing school programs meet the activity requirements of our children and youth, budget cutbacks, inadequate facilities, the absence and/or continued attrition of needed physical education specialists and consultants and insufficient time in school timetables are contributing to the decline of physical education. Many programs are inadequate for fitness gains and for the development of the skills, attitudes and appreciations that support healthy, active lifestyles, now and in the future. Consequently, throughout the nation, there is a devaluation of the importance of physical education.

We must reverse this negative trend if we are to significantly influence the personal well being of Alberta's children and youth as we journey into the 21st century.

ACTIVE LIVING

Concept Turning into Reality

Today's society is now being bombarded with messages related to the lack of health and well being within our society. This has led to a kind of renewed sensitivity for the related issues and the development of the concept of Active Living, a way of life in which physical activity is valued and integrated into daily life.

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Throughout Canada this concept is being widely promoted. As caring professionals, parents, administrators, allied agencies and leaders, we should help our children and youth assimilate skills and values leading towards the acceptance of Active Living as a positive and healthy way of life. Active Living values physical activity as an essential part of the life experience, and students need to be exposed to the conditions necessary for healthy living. Physical education can be pivotal in promoting the Active Living philosophy. If Active Living is to become the “cultural trademark” of Canada advocated by the federal government since 1992, we all should take responsibility for ensuring Active Living becomes an integral part of our lives. Improving the quality of life for our children and youth is worth the effort it takes to secure it.

Education is committed to the holistic development and well being of every child. Physical education makes a unique contribution to the education of all learners and enhances cognitive, social and emotional development. Quality Daily Physical Education (QDPE) is a planned program of instruction and physical activity for all learners on a daily basis throughout the entire school year. QDPE establishes the foundation for Active Living by providing learners with knowledge, skills and positive attitudes. QDPE is the means by which learners embrace lifelong Active Living and should be a school and community’s activity goal.

SOLUTIONS EXPECTED FROM SCHOOLS

As families and social institutions become transformed or devoid of their influence, the public looks increasingly to schools for solutions. (CAHPERD, Physical Education 2000)

Mounting public concern for health and quality life issues and the way in which regular physical activity affects the public has cast education in the leading role of social change agent. This is somewhat contradictory. While schools are expected to teach students how to lead healthy lives, there continues to be a weakening of a commitment to quality physical education, the very instrument which is an inherent health promoter.

PRIORITIES

As physical education teachers we believe physical education has a vital role to play in the design of education for the future. We have no way of knowing what new social structures will emerge or how existing ones will change. We are certain that whatever may arise, physical education has a unique role to fill in the education of children and youth. Physical education empowers individuals to learn about their world and to be active in it. In so doing it nurtures human and social values and encourages the preservation of human rights and freedoms wherein our humanity can be most profoundly expressed.

STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

Albertans have a right to be physically active

As people concerned with the education, health and development of Alberta's children and youth, we believe

- that all students in Alberta schools in every grade should have the right and opportunity to experience sustained, vigorous physical activity and to participate in quality daily physical education programs;
- that all aspects of quality physical education programs have a positive impact on the thinking, knowing and doing (cognitive, affective and physical) domains of the lives of children and youth, and that physically educated children and youth will go on to lead active, healthy and productive lives;
- all teachers responsible for teaching physical education must be professionally prepared physical education teachers, and that through their preparation and ongoing professional development all teachers will have a sound knowledge of the contribution of movement to the total education of children and youth;
- that each school must have at least one professionally prepared physical education specialist who can act as the leader and resource teacher assisting all teachers in the development of the total physical education program;
- that quality physical education programs are equitable (gender, culture, race, ability, etc) in all respects; and
- that local school officials, school boards and the Department of Education have a responsibility to provide appropriate support services to teachers in physical education as well as adequate facilities, resources and equipment.

QUALITY DAILY PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

We believe that quality daily physical education has a balanced, planned and meaningful content which is sequentially and equitably taught to all students throughout the entire school year by competent and enthusiastic teachers as a valued and integral part of the entire education process.

Such a program includes

- fitness and motor skills;
- adequate equipment and facilities;
- recreational/competitive participation opportunities (ie, intramurals, extramurals, clubs);
- competition, fair-play, enjoyment, success and social awareness outcomes;
- adequate instruction time on the weekly schedule;
- individualized learner-centred pedagogy;
- ability to meet the diverse needs, abilities and interests of all students by incorporating a wide range of experiences;
- students who have been empowered to take responsibility for designing, achieving and maintaining their own chosen level of physical activity; and
- supportive administration.

THE PHYSICALLY EDUCATED PERSON

Physically educated persons acquire skills which can help them become physically fit and enable them to perform a variety of physical activities; they participate regularly in physical activity because it is enjoyable and exhilarating. They understand and value physical activity.

1. Acquired Skills

Physically educated persons move efficiently using body and space awareness and are able to differentiate between personal and general space. They are able to assess, design, achieve and maintain a level of personal fitness. They have

- competence in manipulative, transport and balance skills and can perform each of these skills alone or with others;
- ability in a variety of activities; and
- ability to process new skills.

2. Participation

Physically educated persons lead physically active lives and can select and integrate regular physical activity into their lifestyles through participation with others or alone.

3. Understanding and Value

Physically educated persons understand that physical activity provides lifelong opportunities for enjoyment, self expression and social interaction. They understand that there are many reasons to value and enjoy physical activity—to fulfill their human development potential, to adapt and control their physical environment, to relate and interact with others and to learn to live in and with the world around them. Physically educated persons accept and appreciate the differences and abilities of self and others. They understand risk, safety factors and appropriate behavior associated with physical activity and its impact upon their physical, emotional, social and spiritual well being.

OUR VISION FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN ALBERTA

The purpose of education is to develop the ability to think

In our vision physical education plays a valued and vital role in providing a quality, balanced education for all children and youth in Alberta schools. Students are physically educated in a creative and caring atmosphere which has the student's individual interests, needs and circumstances as central factors in curriculum design.

Physical education is not conducted solely in the gymnasium but also in a variety of environments including the outdoors, allowing personal growth in environmental citizenship and ethics. Physical education is actively interfaced with other disciplines such as science, fine arts, language arts, languages and mathematics, and with recreational, intramural, cultural and community involvement.

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Parents and the community will be more deeply involved in physical education and there will be greater empowerment on the part of children and youth to participate in and be decision makers relative to their physical education. Physical education will be a vital component of daily living during the school experience and beyond. Well trained specialists will design and implement programs as part of that broad experience.

The welfare of children and youth and the quality of the skills, knowledge and values they will ultimately derive from physical education is the driving force of our principles and practices.

THE VISION

The vision of fitness in the 21st century depicts a society that

. . . values well being as fundamental and an integral part of day-to-day life. Alberta social structures, the family, the schools, the workplace and the health care system will all enthusiastically embrace and reward daily physical activity and behaviors which contribute significantly to health and well being. Regular physical activity and optimal well being will be ingrained as important and widely accepted as values in Alberta society. Alberta's children and youth will have the foundation skills and the motivation for lifelong participation in physical activity thereby building a natural immunizing effect against sedentary lifestyle diseases. This vision concomitant with our own is achievable. With everyone working together physical education will endure.

WHAT PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN ALBERTA CAN DO

- Be a physically active role model for the children and youth in their school.
- Promote programs which ensure students of all ages receive thirty minutes of vigorous physical education/activity each day.
- Ensure physical education does not end in the gymnasium; it has a place in the classroom too. Physical education is not just exercising the body; it is becoming educated about your body.
- Follow appropriate teaching practices; avoid using exercise as punishment and help children and youth enjoy physical activity.
- Be creative; incorporate activities which encourage maximum participation.
- Encourage skill development; use mini versions of equipment or games to teach basic skills and increase the likelihood of success.
- Let the curriculum reflect the teaching of lifetime physical activities which can be carried over into adulthood instead of just traditional team sports.
 - Encourage parents to become educated about the benefits of active living so that they can become positive role models for their children.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This position is based on the work of the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance and the Ministry of Fitness and Amateur Sport document, *Physical Education 2000*.

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