



## Physical Education for All California Students

**California voters are in “nearly unanimous agreement” (97%) that it is important for schools to encourage more physical activity during the school day**, according to a 2012 Field poll. In addition, three in four (74%) think that providing kids with more physical activity during regular school hours will also have a positive effect on academic achievement. Large majorities believe public investments aimed at keeping people healthy pay for themselves in the long run by preventing disease and reducing health care costs (73%) and think that a comprehensive program to prevent childhood obesity would be worth it even if it increased government spending by billions of dollars (68%). **More Californians favor physical education in schools than any other obesity prevention policy, across most party and socioeconomic lines**, according to a 2011 Field poll. 89% support requiring physical education classes for four years in high school.

There is overwhelming public support for physical education in public schools. Indeed, state law requires that elementary students receive an average of 200 minutes and secondary students 400 minutes of physical education every ten school days. The California Courts of Appeal held in 2010 that physical education is a right in elementary schools, and that parents and students have the right to sue the school district for failure to comply with the minutes requirement.



The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has adopted a physical education policy in response to a community and legal organizing campaign. **“The physical education plan adopted by the Los Angeles Unified School District is a best practice example for districts across the state to provide a quality education for the children of California,”** according to Dr. Robert Ross, President of the California Endowment. “Research tells us physically active and fit kids get better grades and have better overall health.” LAUSD and other school districts demonstrate that physical education can be provided within existing budgets. Indeed, other school districts (including Pomona, Pasadena, El Monte, and Mountain View) are implementing physical education using LAUSD as a best practice.

**Nevertheless, half the school districts audited by the California Department of Education between 2005 and 2009 did not comply with physical education requirements.** In addition, a recent study revealed that elementary school students in districts that did not comply with minutes requirements were more likely to be Hispanic or black and less likely to be white or Asian, while schools in compliant districts included fewer low-income students.

**Students throughout California are not receiving the physical education to which they are entitled. The health of our students is at stake, and we must make sure that physical education is a priority for all school districts.**

Physical education is especially important because it provides students the opportunity to learn the fundamental skills that are the foundation of a healthy, physically active lifestyle. In addition, evidence-based social science research documents that physical education helps reduce obesity and health disparities; promotes the sound development of the child; prepares students with the skills, knowledge and confidence to be physically active throughout their lives; can contribute to better academic performance; and can improve retention and graduation rates.

**Providing quality physical education can be done within existing budgets.** LAUSD voluntarily adopted a physical education plan under the state education code and state and federal civil rights laws in December 2009. The City Project worked with diverse allies in Los Angeles including parents, teachers, the teachers’ union, and public health organizations, to build awareness about the value of physical education, the lack of physical education in school district schools, and health disparities such as obesity and diabetes related to inactivity. In response, the board of education unanimously passed a resolution to comply with physical education and civil rights requirements. LAUSD’s physical education policy seeks to meet physical education minutes requirements in elementary, middle and high schools; provide properly credentialed physical education teachers; maintain reasonable class sizes; provide quality facilities; and comply with education and equal justice laws and principles.

**All California students deserve a quality physical education. Every public school in California can provide students the quality physical education to which they are entitled. Public officials, parents, students, teachers can take action to help students move more, stay healthy, live longer, and do their best in school and in life:**

1. Public officials including the Governor, the Superintendent of Education, the Attorney General, school boards and district superintendents need to send a clear message that physical education is good policy *and* required by law, and that physical education can be provided within existing budgets. The message sent to parents, children and the public if the law is not enforced is that children and their health don't matter.
2. Schools need the resources to provide quality education including physical education. The people of California voted to tax themselves to preserve public education by passing Governor Brown's Proposition 30 in November 2012. The 20-point margin of victory was due to Latino, African American and Asian American voters, the people who disproportionately have children in public schools.
3. The message that physical education is required needs to be an integral part of the Team California for Healthy Kids initiative.
4. Each district should consider the LAUSD physical education policy as a best practice example to adapt in its own schools.
5. Disparities in physical education and health for students of color and low-income students need to be addressed directly, as in the LAUSD policy.
6. Each district should provide teachers with training focused on activity-based physical education. Professional development should be one of the highest priorities because its effectiveness is supported by substantial evidence.
7. Effective monitoring is necessary to ensure districts comply with physical education requirements. Parents, students and teachers are in the best position to monitor physical education in the long term, and should be educated, engaged and empowered to do so.
8. Moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) should be increased to 50% or more of physical education class time. This can be done through teacher training, by including this explicit requirement in district policy, or by revising state law to include this requirement.
9. The PETIP (Physical Education Teacher Incentive Program) grant program should be amended to provide funding for teacher training and prohibit PETIP funds from being used for programs other than physical education.
10. Physical education classes should have parity with academic class sizes.
11. The shared use of schools, pools and parks can help provide facilities for physical education on school days, and physical activity after school and on weekends.
12. Federal education standards should include quality physical education.

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