

Advantages and Disadvantages of Mandatory PE in Schools

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There are pros and cons to mandatory physical education (PE) classes, but the health benefits often outweigh other considerations. With obesity concerns on the rise, PE classes are often viewed as a necessary requirement by both parents and school administrators. Without required PE courses, some students might choose to ignore physical activity completely, focusing on sedentary pursuits.

Good Habits

Required PE classes help students develop good exercise habits, resulting in healthier lifestyles. According to the Bright Hub Education website, healthy exercise helps prevent obesity and other serious illnesses, such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and osteoporosis. Because most of the normal school day requires students to participate in relatively sedentary activities, mandatory PE classes force students to do something active. The classes help students burn calories, exercise muscles, reduce stress levels and improve their psychological and physical health.

Future Health

Physical education courses encourage students to lead healthy lives. Bright Hub states that people who exercise regularly during childhood and adolescence are more likely to exercise during adulthood. Without a PE requirement, some students might opt out of the class due to laziness or self-indulgence. If they never exercise as students, it could be difficult for them to practice self-discipline and develop healthy exercise habits as adults. They might also avoid future physical activity if they feel self-conscious about their lack of fitness and resulting physical limitations, especially if their adult peers are in better physical condition.

Liability Risks

As important as physical activity is to health and well-being, it's important to remember that physical education courses include fitness training, sports and games that could potentially result in physical injury. Students who don't have much athletic ability may not have the skills necessary to defend themselves against more competitive athletes. Uncoordinated, weak and overweight students might get bullied by athletic students or hurt themselves while playing sports or using fitness equipment. Even healthy, athletic students are susceptible to PE injuries. And although students may receive similar injuries on the playground or in extracurricular sports, they can choose whether to participate -- it's not mandatory.

Academic Conflicts

Mandatory PE classes can be disadvantageous for students who have strict academic requirements. Some students need class time to focus on advanced coursework that might help them get into competitive colleges. Ohio news publication "West Life" reports that some school-board members think PE requirements should be waived for students with heavy academic loads and time-consuming classes, such as choir and band. These students are often forced to take physical education classes during the summer in other school districts that offer them. Mandatory PE classes limit a student's freedom to choose where she wants to invest her time.