

Should PE Classes Be Mandatory?

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Many public schools are decreasing or eliminating mandatory physical education programs from elementary, middle and high schools. A 2013 study by the Institute of Medicine cites several reasons for this, including lack of funding and school testing standards. However, this reduction may contribute to obesity and affect children's health. New solutions need to be implemented to ensure that students receive the exercise and nutrition information they need.

Budget Shortfalls

It is understandable that some schools may need to reduce or cut PE programs entirely. If the choice is to crowd even more children into classrooms or cut gym, many parents would prefer smaller class sizes. Public schools are having to adopt a "do more with less" philosophy. Something must be cut, and due to the rising importance of standardized test scores, administrators cannot risk cutting programs focusing on core studies such as English and math. By making gym classes optional, schools are trying to placate everyone.

Obesity Crisis

Unfortunately, Americans are gaining more and more weight every year, and part of the problem is that we aren't moving enough. PE programs give children some opportunity to exercise every day. In addition, many PE programs include a nutrition component. Learning about healthy food choices is important in a society where junk food is available and advertised constantly. By taking away these chances to exercise and learn, there is a greater chance of children becoming obese. Older students especially may not want to take PE classes, but pre-teens and teens are most at risk because they are less likely to engage in physical play outside of school hours.

ADHD and The Crisis of Boys

It is no secret that boys are falling behind in American education and diagnoses of Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder are on the rise. According to the Centers for Disease Control, there was a 21 percent increase in the number of children diagnosed with ADHD since 2007. According to "Time Magazine," one in five high school boys have been diagnosed with the disorder. Children with ADHD may benefit from physical activity because concentrating for longer periods of time can be difficult for them. Mandatory PE classes benefit kids not only physically, but also mentally. Leaving this option up to the discretion of school administrators may deny some children a service that could help them succeed in the classroom.

Outside Credit

For teenagers, there is a workable solution to this problem. Many schools have started awarding school credit for outside participation in a sport or activity. According to Fairview Park City Schools in Fairview Park, Ohio, students can submit a credit flex plan to receive credit for physical activity outside of school. This can be

beneficial for both schools and students because it allows students to take more academic classes while encouraging them to get regular exercise each day. It can also be less intimidating for less athletically inclined students. High schools can reduce the number of gym classes they offer, but elementary and middle school students still need mandatory physical activity in the school day to keep children active and engaged in class.