
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: Senate Committee on Education

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Subject: Overview of Health and Physical Education

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide an overview of Health and Physical Education in Vermont.

Introduction

Health and Physical Education as courses of study provide students with essential skills for healthy living after high school. Students who participate in Physical Education are almost twice as likely to maintain healthy levels of physical activity after graduation (Center for Disease Control (CDC), 2022). Research also suggests that greater opportunities to engage in physical activity and physical education in school support student academic achievement, behavior management, overall health (e.g., lower rates of obesity), and increase school attendance (National Institute of Health, 2013).

Physical Education in Vermont supports student health, in a context where student health needs have grown in many areas in recent years. Based on 2019 Youth Behavior Risk Survey data, a quarter of Vermont high school students reported an overweight weight-height ratio (Vermont Department of Health, 2020). A quarter of high school students, in the same survey, also reported that they did not meet U.S. Department of Health Physical Activity Recommendations (of participating in 60 minutes of physical activity a day). LGBT students report both lower rates of physical activity and higher rates of obesity than their cisgender/heterosexual counterparts (Vermont Department of Health, 2020). The growing mental health needs of students in Vermont have also been recently documented and discussed in this state legislature (Brighter Futures, 2022; Mental Health First Aid, 2023). Physical Education is, therefore, important for all Vermont students.

Vermont Statute and Rule

There are several state statutes which provide direction to Physical Education practice in the state. Physical Education is noted as a required Course of Study in [16 VSA 906](#), along with other disciplines such as English. [16 VSA 136](#) provides further nuance to what physical education should look like in the state, as it defines Physical Education as “a sequential, developmentally



appropriate program that is an enjoyable experience for students and is designed to help students develop the knowledge, skill, self-management skill, attitudes, and confidence needed to adopt and maintain physical fitness throughout their lives.”

There are also state statutes in place that dictate how Physical Education, and other disciplines, are taught in the state. An important focus within Physical Education is supporting students with diverse abilities through tiered systems of support. These accommodations are dictated by both federal (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and state law ([16 VSA 2902](#)) and written into State Board of Education Rules ([Education Quality Standards \(EQS\) 2121.5](#)).

Vermont State Board of Education Rule, as written into EQS, provides further guidance to local schools on the implementation of Physical Education. In EQS, it states, “Each school shall provide students in grades K-8 with at least two physical education classes per week. Each school shall provide students in grades 9-12 with one and one-half years of physical education or the equivalent thereof.” ([EQS 2120.5](#)) In 2015, the Vermont State Board of Education also adopted the [2014 Society of Health and Physical Educators \(SHAPE\) National Physical Education Standards](#). These standards are in place to guide what is taught in local Vermont schools and are used to ground the development of local Proficiency Based Graduation Requirements.

National Physical Education Standards

The SHAPE National Physical Education Standards (2014) are,

- 1. The physically literate individual demonstrates competency in a variety of motor skills and movement patterns.**
- 2. The physically literate individual applies knowledge of concepts, principles, strategies and tactics related to movement and performance.**
- 3. The physically literate individual demonstrates the knowledge and skills to achieve and maintain a health-enhancing level of physical activity and fitness.**
- 4. The physically literate individual exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others.**
- 5. The physically literate individual recognizes the value of physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression and/or social interaction.**

These five anchor standards are broken down by [grade level expectations](#), so that students can be assessed on their way toward proficiency in these broader standards throughout their K-12 journey. These standards are, however, currently under revision by SHAPE. The expected release of these revised standards is March 2024.

Physical Education in Vermont

The following data are pulled to highlight what Physical Education in Vermont looks like, and some of the similarities and differences that exist between schools. These data are the earliest available and come from multiple sources (Vermont Agency of Education, Vermont Department of Health, and the U.S. Department of Education) and largely represent Physical Education in state public schools.

School Level

- In 2020, “three-quarters (76%) [of Vermont schools] require physical education teachers to follow a written physical education curriculum, two-thirds (68%) limit class size so they are the same size as other subject areas.” (School Health Profiles*, 2020).
- In 2020, “all schools included students with disabilities in regular physical education courses as appropriate; 84% provide adapted physical education courses.”
- In 2020, “nearly half (44%) allow for the use of waivers, exemptions, or substitutions for physical education requirements.” (School Health Profiles, 2020).
- “Since first asked, having a School Improvement Plan has significantly increased for objectives related to health education, physical education, physical activity, food and beverages available outside the school meal program, counseling, psychological and social services, the physical environment, social and emotional climate, community involvement and employee wellness. However, between 2018 and 2020, fewer SIPs included objectives related to health education (40% vs 29%) and physical education (34% vs 24%).” (School Health Profiles, 2020).

**** Data from School Health Profiles represent weighted responses of all Vermont public schools that serve students between the 6th and 12th grade. These data are collected by the Vermont Department of Health.***

Teacher Level

- In 2020, “nearly all schools require physical education teachers to be certified, licensed, or endorsed by the state (99%).” (School Health Profiles, 2020).
- In both 2020 and 2021 (most recent years of data collection), there has been a statewide shortage of Physical Education teachers in Vermont (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).
- In 2021, there were 19 Physical Educators granted 1st Year Provisional or Emergency Licenses to teach in the state (VT Agency of Education, 2022).

Student Level

- Based on 2020 data, “all students were required to complete physical education courses in sixth and seventh grades. While more than nine in ten schools required physical education in eighth (98%) and ninth grades (95%), required courses for older students decrease to less than half of all schools requiring physical education among 12th grade students (46%).” (School Health Profiles, 2020).
- The following chart breaks down student attendance in different Vermont PE, or potential PE credit, courses in 2021. ([Vermont Agency of Education, 2023](#))

2021 Course Enrollment

Course	Student Count±
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Adapted Physical Education	1708
Aquatics/Water Sports	198
Health and Fitness	1902
IB Sports, Exercise, and Health Science	26
Individual/Dual Sports	1213
Off-Campus Sports	917
Physical Education	8315
Physical Education (grade Pk-8)	26951
Physical Education Equivalent	101
Physical Education/Health/Drivers' Education	139
Physical Education—General	3409
Physical Education—Independent Study	435
Physical Education—Other	1178
Physical Education—Workplace Experience	138
Physical, Health, and Safety Education—Independent Study	1166
Physical, Health, and Safety Education—Other	164
Recreation Sports	637
Team Sports	2129
Total	50,726

±There are potential cross classified courses, meaning that these student numbers are likely higher than actual attendance in “each course”. It is possible for students to be double counted in some of these areas.

References

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