



Physical Education (PE) Policy: Considerations for California

Current California PE Law

- Elementary grades 1-6, minimum of 200 minutes each 10 days (Education Code (EC) 51210)
- Secondary grades 7-12, minimum 400 minutes each 10 days (EC 51222)
- Elementary school districts grades 1-8, minimum of 200 minutes each 10 days (EC 51223)
- School districts must administer the CDE designated physical performance test annually to all students in grades 5, 7 and 9 (EC 60800)
- Graduation from high school requires completion of two courses in PE (EC 51225.3)
- Any pupil may be excused from PE during one of grades 10, 11, or 12 for no more than 24 clock hours to participate in driver training (EC 51222)
- The school board or superintendent may exempt any senior high student from PE, if the student is engaged in a school-sponsored interscholastic athletic program (EC 51242)
- The school board or superintendent, may grant students who are 16 years or older and in grade 10 grade for one year or longer permanent exemption from PE (EC 51241)
- The school board or superintendent, with the consent of the student, may grant the student a PE exemption for any two years during grades 10-12 (EC 51241) (*This section of the law becomes ineffective as of July 1, 2007*).

As of July 1, 2007:

- Students desiring a two-year exemption from PE will be required to pass the physical performance test administered in grade 9.
- Schools will be required to make the physical performance test available to students in grades 10-12; students who wish to retake the test in grades 10-12 may do so in order to be receive the two year exemption from PE.

California Content Standards

The *Physical Education Content Standards for California Public Schools, Kindergarten through Grade Twelve* (the PE Content Standards) developed by the California Department of Education (CDE) identify the essential skills students will need to be physically active throughout their lifetime. They PE Content Standards provide guidance for developing PE programs and outline what students should be able to know and do at each grade level.

Curriculum for Physical Education

Decisions about how to teach the PE Content Standards is left up to teachers, schools, and local education agencies. CDE does not maintain its own PE curriculum and does not officially approve outside PE curricula. Using the content standards as guidance, schools may develop or procure PE curricula that allow students to acquire the essential skills, attitudes, knowledge, and confidence to establish and maintain a physically active, healthy lifestyle.





Considerations when Developing & Implementing PE Policy

Many schools are developing and implementing PE policies that aim to increase the physical activity levels of students. Policies will typically focus on changing either the quality of PE or the amount (quantity) of PE. In order to successfully implement PE policies, it is important to consider current practices, along with the practical, logistical, and both short and long-term costs of the policy.

Whether implementing policies that aim to improve the *quality* or *quantity* of PE, schools may need to consider the following:

- the potential impact on school schedules
- staffing needs
- whether the proposed policy would require longer school days to accommodate more students taking PE
- the potential for altering teacher schedules (which might mean collective bargaining)
- graduation requirements based on education code
- adequate space
- equipment needs
- adequacy of facilities
- teacher to student ratios (class size)
- teacher training needs
- curriculum needs

PE at Different Grade Levels

Different grade levels face unique barriers to improving either the quality or quantity of PE; these barriers must be considered when implementing PE policy. For example, in elementary schools, teachers often lack training in how to teach PE, and students rarely receive the required minutes of PE. In middle schools, large class sizes are cited as a barrier to quality PE; and in high schools, competing academic priorities and exemptions (such as marching band or driver training) pose barriers to both the quality and quantity of PE.

Policy Considerations

Developing and implementing policies that improve PE in California schools is a critical first step in addressing physical inactivity in children. The following steps may be useful when implementing PE policy:

1. Examine current practices and policies to identify areas for improvement.
2. Ensure schools are meeting current PE code requirements.
3. Adopt policies that will assist with meeting current requirements.
4. Identify whether priority areas for improvement are quantity or quality issues (or both).
5. When aiming to improve the quality of PE, consider training teachers, hiring PE specialists, reducing class size, upgrading facilities/equipment, and/or improving PE programs/curricula.
6. When aiming to improve the quantity of PE, first ensure that the quality of PE will not suffer (e.g. class size, adequately trained teachers). Determine if changes will impact school schedules, such as requiring additional classes, longer school days or changes to teacher's schedules.
7. Ensure that policies support quality PE for all students and do not stigmatize unfit or overweight students.