

Proposal for P.E. Workshops for Classroom Teachers
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Where are We?

In January of 2010, the Los Angeles County Office of Education released a statement, “This generation of children, may be the first in history to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents. Of the 1.7 million students attending Los Angeles County schools, over 40% are overweight or obese.” This statement was based on the data provided by the statewide fitness test (California Department of Education Physical Fitness Test) given to every 5th, 7th and 9th grader attending a public school in California.

The state of California requires that each student (attending a public school) receive 200 minutes of physical education for every 10 school days in grades one through sixth (Education Code Section 51210). It is the only standard that stipulates a specific amount of time given to an area of education in any given field. Unfortunately, with the state’s budget crisis, finding funds to provide elementary schools with qualified P.E. teachers is becoming increasingly difficult. Therefore, the duty of teaching physical education will be left to the classroom teacher. However, most of the classroom teachers are untrained, and have difficulties administering a comprehensive physical education program. Many of these teachers have a general attitude that physical education isn’t a priority. This mindset prevents many teachers from providing a quality P.E. programs that would support activities and skills appropriate for their students’ developmental stages.

Five years ago, the Newhall School District (along with several other local school districts) adopted the SPARK (Sport, Play & Active Recreation for Kids) curriculum from San Diego State University Foundation. This curriculum was an answer to many classroom teachers’ complaint of not having adequate curriculum for teaching P.E. SPARK was established specifically with the needs of the classroom teacher in mind. It allowed for little set-up, and progressive lesson planning along with teaching cues. It also encouraged teachers to attend a weeklong seminar at the SPARK Institute (in San Diego) for additional training. Several teachers (from each school site) were sent to these workshops with the intention that they would come back and train their colleagues on how to use the curriculum properly. Unfortunately, most of the school-site training did not occur and the curriculum sat on the shelves.

A year later, the Newhall School District conducted a survey and found that less than 30% of their teachers were actually utilizing the SPARK curriculum on a regular basis. Their number one complaint was that they found it to be confusing and required too much set-up.

In the years of being a P.E. teacher at the Newhall School District, I have been asked to meet with several grade level teams at various school sites in order to discuss their P.E. program(s). Often times, I have found that classroom teachers have many misconceptions about how to implement a quality physical education program that would be developmentally appropriate for their students. For example, many classroom teachers begin teaching an activity (i.e. 3-on-3

basketball, soccer, flag-football, etc.) without teaching the basic skills required in order for the student to be proficient during participation. Another common mistake made, is the amount of time a teacher will spend on a unit. Several teachers have informed me that they have spent up to 12 weeks (or longer) teaching from one unit. This thorough progression has often resulted in both the teacher and students becoming mentally fatigued about the unit of study. Finally, the most common issue that arises with classroom teachers begins with which skills and activities that the teacher will start teaching. Often times this is based on the teacher's interest and not the students' level of ability. For example, a teacher who is familiar with Frisbee may begin by having the students practice tossing and catching with a partner. However, it would be equitable if the teacher began the lesson by having students tossing and catching the flying disc to him/herself. This would allow the teacher time to assess his/her students' hand-eye coordination prior to jumping into an activity that requires students to be proficient at throwing and catching an object while moving.

Where Do We Want to Be?

If (and when) funding necessitate that classroom teachers take the reigns of teaching physical education once again, then steps need to be taken in order to ensure that they have all the essential tools to provide their students with a high quality P.E. program. Ideally, we want to see classroom teachers give as much time and energy to teaching physical education as they do to other subjects. We want them to create a model for which their students are motivated, and excited about developing their own skills, and improving their physical fitness. In order to accomplish this, teachers need to understand the importance of skill development to the cognitive and associative growth of the whole child, and how that relates to their classroom performance. The latter is an important selling point to providing an incentive to the classroom educator as the goal will be to see the teacher taking the reigns and leading the charge to developing a wellness program that would have a positive impact on their students, parents and community.

How Do We Get There?

In order to provide classroom teachers with the necessary tools, I propose that the Newhall School District invest in providing P.E. workshops for their teachers. The workshops would provide motivation, training and support for each of the classroom teachers.

First, the workshop would address the issue of getting classroom teachers on board by addressing their number one contention – “Why should I...” In a survey administered in February 2010, to the Newhall School District, (see Appendix) 70% of classroom teachers ranked teaching P.E. as “Somewhat of a priority.” When asked to describe their attempts at meeting the P.E. standards, “half-hearted” and “secondary to teaching academics” was the common response given. Their reasoning demonstrates their lack of motivation and understanding that the impact physical activity can have on the academic performance of their students.

The workshops would begin by educating classroom teachers of the academic and behavioral benefits to the students through regular physical activity. For example, studies are showing that physical activity is beneficial to cognition during early and middle periods of the human lifespan. People who exercise on a regular basis learn faster, remember more, think clearer and are less prone to have behavioral issues. Researchers have found that aerobic exercise generates

stress, which forces the body to produce and increase the number of capillaries servicing the brain. These blood vessels allow for a greater exchange of nutrients and waste products. It also allows for optimum oxygen and glucose delivery to the brain, which can help to improve brain function – especially the ability to think, learn, and remember. In other words, exercise “builds the pipes” for improved cognition.

The workshop would also emphasize the need for prioritizing physical education programs in elementary schools. First, by examining the growing epidemic of childhood obesity in America. For example, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that childhood obesity has more than tripled in the last 30 years and is steadily increasing. Students who are obese are at risk for developing chronic diseases associated with type 2 diabetes, heart disease and several types of cancers. While poor diet is a key culprit to this growing problem, lack of physical activity is another contributing factor. The CDC recommends that children and adolescents participate in 60 minutes (or more) of physical activity on a daily basis. So important is this issue that on February 9, 2010 the First Lady, Michelle Obama launched a campaign called “Let’s Move” in order to address childhood obesity in America. Not only is she lending a voice to champion this cause, she is also leading the charge by stressing the importance of physical activity with her own young daughters, Sasha and Malia, “My kids have to get up and move. They can’t sit in front of the TV. I have my girls involved in sports because I want them as young women to understand what it feels like to compete and to win and to run and to sweat.” According to an article *Rationale for Schools and Community Efforts to Promote Physical Activity Among Young People*, the author states that schools play a key role in providing physical education and wellness programs as they are the most efficient vehicle for effectively reaching the highest population of youths in America. The article also states, “People begin, acquire and establish patterns of health-related behaviors during childhood and adolescence.” Therefore, it is critical that classroom teachers prioritize their efforts by providing an example and cultivating a quality physical education program for their students.

The workshops would train classroom teachers to create a P.E. program by utilizing their current curriculum (SPARK) along with other resources. Teachers would meet at various school sites depending on their grade-level (i.e. Kindergarten at Wiley Canyon; 1st grade at Valencia Valley, 2nd grade at Oak Hills; and etc.). They would work within their school site teams and familiarize themselves with the California Physical Education Standards (for their grade-level) after a briefing on the developmental stages of their age group. For example, the trainer at the 1st grade site would go over the developmental characteristics and abilities of their students and how that would guide instruction. The trainer would also explain that utilizing big beach balls (or foam balls) to teach first graders various throwing patterns (overhead two-handed, underhand, and overhand), and how to catch a ball would be ideal as opposed to utilizing a harder ball, which would frighten many of their younger students.

The trainers would also provide guidelines on how to utilize their curriculum effectively and efficiently. In order to prevent mental fatigue, teachers would be instructed to focus on one unit for about 3 weeks. Teach specific skills and modify games/activities so that all of the students are actively moving (more than 50% of the time) and having fun. The trainers would also

emphasize that while meeting the P.E. standards are important, the priority is to create a program that relays the message “that physical activity is fun.”

Next, the workshops would present various models of P.E. programs for which each school-site could evaluate, and adapt to meet their own school setting. For example, one school-site may decide to have an entire grade level participate in P.E. by rotating each class through various stations at specified times (i.e. 4 stations rotating every 20-min.) This would mean that each classroom teacher would be responsible for teaching one of the stations. At another site, the same grade-level may determine that due to lack of equipment, they may have to have to teach P.E. one class at a time on a pre-designated day and time.

Following, each team would work on developing their block plans based on the type of P.E. model they adopt for their school-site. The trainer’s role would be to provide assistance in order to ensure that the block plans are developmentally appropriate and realistic. By creating a “road map” of what skills and activities they would like to see their students master, the teachers would develop their block plans that would follow a progression of developing basic skills effectively and efficiently.

In addition to dispensing motivation and training, the workshops would also provide additional support to the teachers through a website. The website would contain current information on health and wellness, age-specific lesson plans, indoor activities, skills video and product information, and resources. This would allow teachers to access information quickly without having to thumb through various text.

Funding for these workshops would depend on whether or not the trainer is currently employed by the district. If yes, then the district would need to pay for the materials. The workshop would be in place of the weekly staff meetings or professional staff development. Teachers in the Newhall School District are contractually obligated to have one staff meeting a week. In place of a regular staff meeting, a workshop could be conducted. If no, then the school district would be responsible for trainer’s travel expenses, materials and workshop fees.

Being physically active is one of the most important steps to being healthy. Schools and classroom teachers play a significant role in teaching youth how to adopt and maintain a healthy, and active lifestyle. Participating in at least 60-minutes of physical activity on a daily basis has been proven to reduce the prevalence of overweight and obesity in school-aged children. Significant amount of studies have shown that there is a correlation between physical activity, and improved brain function. If the current budget crisis in California should necessitate that classroom teachers administer P.E. along with academics, then adequate training and support must be provided to ensure that a quality program is established. Physical Education Workshops will assist classroom educators in motivating them to lead the charge on addressing the need for developing and taking ownership of each students’ personal fitness.

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Appendix:

Classroom Teacher P.E. Questionnaire

I am currently working on a school project on Sports Management through Eastern Oregon University. It is a proposal that would create P.E. workshops for classroom teacher (at elementary grade level). Your participation would be greatly appreciated as it will allow for me to direct my proposals to the needs of the classroom teacher. It will only take a couple of minutes to answer. Thank you!

Educational Code Section 51210 requires 200 minutes of physical education every ten school days for students in grade one through 6th.

Defining Physical Education: education (locomotor, nonlocomotor, movement patterns, rhythmic skills) through movement.

Grade level: _____ School Site: _____

Do you have a P.E. program at your school site? Yes No

If yes, would you please briefly describe the P.E. program and how many minutes of instructions occurs at your site. _____

Do you utilize the SPARK's curriculum in order to teach P.E.? (Circle appropriate answer)

Never Sometimes Most of the time All the time

What were some of the difficulties you have found with utilizing the SPARK's curriculum? (Circle all answers that apply)

Confusing

Lots of set-up

Lacking equipment

Other:

Are you familiar with your grade-level P.E. standards?

Yes

No

What are the issues that prevent you from meeting the P.E. standards? (Circle all appropriate answers)

Set-up of equipment

Lack of time

Lack of training

Do not like teaching P.E.

Do not know what to do

Other: _____

How would you rank teaching P.E.? (Circle answer)

Not a priority

Somewhat of a priority

A priority

How would you describe your attempt at meeting the P.E. standards?
