

Advocating for Quality Physical Education

By Meaghan Quinn

Teachers have long suspected it. Physical educators believe it. Researchers have proved it. And we, as an association, work towards spreading the message to families, schools, communities, and government: Increasing kids' physical activity boosts academic achievement.

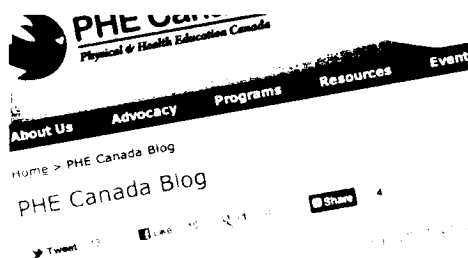
Based on a survey of more than 800 studies, the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine recently found evidence of a significant longitudinal positive relationship between physical activity and academic performance and concluded that students who are physically active earn higher grades and score better on achievement tests than their inactive peers. Additionally, a solid understanding and appreciation of physical activity can help encourage a lifetime of healthy behaviours and actions, which is critical for a generation that faces a childhood obesity crisis and the real possibility that they will not outlive their parents.

Nevertheless, despite encouraging and ongoing studies that promote the positive benefits of physical activity, many children and youth do not receive an adequate amount in schools today. Only three provinces (British Columbia, Ontario, and Alberta) mandate a minimum amount of daily physical activity. By comparison, on a nationwide basis, students' skills are routinely tested in math, literacy, and science and the markers used to demonstrate the knowledge base of today's children.

Instead of a school curriculum that values all aspects of the child, the spotlight increasingly focusses on only a few subjects that are assigned value to children and youth today. This is not to say that

these programs aren't important, they very much are, but physical activity and health education need to be held to the same standard of accountability.

PHE Canada is currently highlighting the need to place physical health and education on an equal footing with math, science,



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www.phecanada.ca/blog

and languages in the education system. This ongoing campaign will involve increasing awareness around the importance of physical and health education and working towards physical education being understood and valued for how it affects the lives of children and youth.

One project we're currently working on will be revealed at the upcoming PHE

Canada/TAPHE National Conference 2012, May 10 to 12, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. This tool will be a Physical Literacy Awareness Video which illustrates the importance of physical literacy in children and youth. The video aims to create knowledge and awareness about physical literacy, how it is nurtured, and how it plays a role in supporting lifelong healthy living. The video also features a connection to the Canadian Sport for Life Long Term Athlete Development model. It will also focus on the key settings where physical literacy should be formed, such as school physical education, sport and community based programs, and at home with families. This video will be placed on our website, presented in workshops, and used in our advocacy campaign.

All children deserve to learn in a supportive and healthy environment that provides the opportunities needed to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and habits required to lead healthy and active lives. Often those schools that provide such an environment have been championed by a person or group of people who not only understand the importance, but who also advocate to make it happen – whether it is supportive government officials, school administrators, teachers, parents, public health officials, or concerned citizens.

If you don't have a quality physical or health education program at your school, we encourage you to check out the 'Take Action' section of our website (www.phecanada.ca/advocacy/take-action) which features tools for parents, teachers, administrators, and politicians to advocate for quality physical and health education programs. ■