

Mandatory Physical Education Class For High School Students

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Side In Favor Vs Side Against This

Physical education can be described as a socially constructed activity and is one of the gears of the wider physical culture which pertains to body and movement (Kirk). In the context of schools, the term physical education is often used interchangeably with sports and games, and as an academic subject, it is based on a planned curriculum with instruction embedded in knowledge, skill and behaviour aimed at developing physical fitness (Lynch and Soukup). The proponents of physical education promote it as a mandatory subject for high school students, whereas the opponents disagree and endorse it as an optional subject. This paper aims to present the reasons supporting both views, followed by the proposition of a mediating solution.

Arguments in Favor of Mandatory Physical Education

Since the seventeenth century, the medical benefits of physical education have been advocated, with Sweden's Per Ling being the first person to associate it with health-related dimensions (Lynch and Soukup). Physical education is thought to have numerous health benefits, from decreasing the chances of obesity in later life to promoting an active and healthy lifestyle. A sedentary lifestyle leads to health problems, and this is one of the growing concerns around the world, whereas an active lifestyle leads to reduced risks of various health conditions, including cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes and obesity. It not only strengthens muscles and improves balance and coordination but also improves bone health by increasing strength and bone density, ultimately resulting in a reduced risk of back aches and fractures in adult life. Among high-risk youths, the psychological benefits of physical activity result in improved and stable moods reduced depression and anxiety and can also help in the reduction of blood pressure and cholesterol. It also improves memory and induces better sleep by relieving stress and boosting the overall mood (Malina, Bouchard and Bar-Or).

The benefits of physical education are not only limited to health concerns. Rather, its advantages can be garnered for objectives related to cognitive, emotional and social domains as well. According to Talbot, physical education is central to enabling students to develop a positive body image and respect not only their own bodies but others as well. He further suggested that it is associated with a cohesive development of body and cognition, and it induces self-esteem, confidence and academic achievement.

A significant part of students' daytime is spent in schools, and the experiences that they gain there have an important influence on the majority of the population. In effect, the role that schools can play in instilling a healthy lifestyle through increased physical activity is incomparable to any other (Pate, Davis and Robinson). The World Health Organization has regarded these educational institutes as the most economical way through which nations can achieve dual benefits, i.e., improving literacy and promoting health. The role of schools in endorsing physical activity is highlighted by a number of organizations, including the "American Heart Association", "Centers for Disease Control and Prevention", and the "US Department of Health and Human Services" (McKenzie and Lounsbery).

The importance of physical activity in improving academic achievement is often used to promote the argument of mandatory PE lessons. Physical activity influences the blood flow to the brain, stabilizing mood and alertness. This results in increased self-esteem and enhanced academic performance. The research evidence proposes that increased levels of physical activity in school do not hinder or distract students from their academic goals. Rather, in most instances, it is a cause for improvement. Additionally, in terms of social development, physical activity and sports improve moral reasoning, instil a sense of fair play among students, foster sportsmanship and develop personal responsibility (Bailey).

Arguments Against Mandatory Physical Education

The opponents of having physical education as a mandatory subject in high school advocate that students must have a choice to opt for this subject. Not everyone has an athletic disposition, and many students end up detesting the physical education class as it promotes athletic supremacy, and athletes are regarded at the top of the school's social structure. Such segregation results in students feeling embarrassed of their bodies, and it results in a negative impact on one's self-esteem (Parr).

Bullying is one of the most prevalent concerns that students have to face, and numerous authors have linked the environment of a PE class to episodes of bullying. Additionally, it is mostly the students suffering from obesity that are harassed, ultimately threatening their self-image. In effect, many students associate negatively with physical activities and tend to avoid school in order to stay away from situations that make them vulnerable. This not only results in increased absenteeism but also becomes a barrier for the bullying victims in preventing them from reaping other benefits of learning and socialization offered by schools (Jiménez-Barbero, Jiménez-Loaisa and Beltrán-Carrillo).

The cost of a mandatory gym class exceeds any benefits that it might reap. A couple of physical education lessons in a week might not greatly impact student's health; however, the impact it has on the school's budget is quite significant. The cost incurred at running an extra department should be invested in bringing about a much-needed improvement in academics. The money spent on up-keeping a huge gym and maintaining the equipment can rather be expended on retaining teachers and enhancing the existing academic programs. The injury caused in a physical education class can prove to be a liability. Children with pre-existing medical conditions are at an increased risk of injury;

the same is the case of forcing students to play in environments that are either too hot or too cold and can cause serious health concerns in already susceptible children, such as those suffering from asthma. (Strain).

A Balanced Curriculum-Based Solution

The possible solution proposed to mediate between the proponents and opponents of mandatory physical education classes can be based on updating the physical education curriculum to make it academically sound and rigorous. Such a curriculum should take into account the objectives that are in line with the developmental requirements of all students to foster equality and positive self-image regardless of their athletic disposition. Integrating core subjects with physical education can also result in increased interest and importance associated with it. Sound evaluation processes should be adopted to grade students' progress and should assess attributes such as ethics, effort and overall attitude. Furthermore, an anti-bullying plan should be in place, and teachers should be trained to carry it out effectively. (Nickel).

Conclusion

Though both the proponents and opponents have arguments evidenced in research, the health benefits and psychological benefits of physical activity cannot be denied; neither can the importance of investing additional resources in improving academics. Policymakers, school leaders, teachers and the community of parents should come together with probable mediating solutions to take advantage of this physical activity tool that we have at our disposal to create positive experiences filled with enjoyment and engagement while ensuring that the mental health and safety of the students is maintained by teachers and trainers who are committed and supportive. Only through an effective role played by everyone can the likelihood of realizing the potential benefits of participation in a physical education class be increased.

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