

Physical Activity:



A Critical Component of a Complete Education

Long ago, Hippocrates (460-377 B.C.) advocated that people get adequate rest, exercise, fresh air, massages, baths, and eat a proper diet.¹

His work represented the culmination of decades of health teaching and a revolution in the practice of medicine. Often considered the father of medicine, Hippocrates was born and raised by a family of priests, physicians, and teachers. Seventh-day Adventists in these same professions today promote a similar health message.

BY BRIAN SATHER

Although physical educators in the 21st century advocate healthy living for all, and physical activity as an integral component of education, this campaign is widely ignored. Plato (427-347 B.C.) spawned the dualistic notion of a separate mind (good) and body (bad) that is still prevalent in religion and education. The main focus during the school day is the development of the mind through traditional subjects like mathematics, English, and science. Under this persisting model, children sit passively at their desks attempting to develop their minds and reasoning capacity while ignoring the needs of their bodies. This focus is unacceptable based on the modern (and very Adventist) idea of wholistic wellness, which views as imperative that each person should develop socially, physically, spiritually, environmentally, intellectually, emotionally, and occupationally throughout his or her lifetime.² A properly designed physical education curriculum emphasizes more of these dimensions than any other single subject, even though the physical activity elements are paramount.

In the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education, the role of physical activity has always had a vital place. Ellen White emphasized its importance in the opening paragraph of her book *Education*:

“True education means more than the pursuit of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.”³

Furthermore, in *The Ministry of Healing*, Ellen White recommended ex-

ercise along with other important health practices such as breathing fresh air, bathing frequently, eating a proper diet, and getting adequate rest.⁴ The concepts she espoused support the guidelines presented by Hippocrates as well as today’s health professionals.

Seventh-day Adventists must continue to set a good example in health promotion and healthful practices. Research studies have shown that Adventists have longer-than-average life spans, which is attributable to lifestyle factors including regular physical activity.⁵ Adventist schools should continue to propagate these values, which not only increase longevity but also enhance quality of life. An emphasis on physical activity and health is increasingly important in light of ominous trends toward physical inactivity, especially in today’s youth.

The Shape of Physical Education

Internationally, physical education programs have improved, with a substantial majority of countries now requiring 14 years of physical education in their schools.⁶ However, based on a review of literature, Polidoro found both positive and negative developments in physical education throughout the world.

In the United States, there have recently been both positive and negative trends. In 1866, California became the first state to pass a law requiring physical education in schools.⁷ Although many locations initially followed this trend, by the end of the 1990s, many states were eliminating this requirement—in large part because of the need to focus on subjects like reading and math that were being measured by state-mandated high-stakes tests. At one point, Illinois was the only state that required daily physical education for all students in grades K-12; yet even there, schools could obtain waivers en-

abling them to omit mandatory physical education from their program.⁸ Across the United States, educators have had to struggle to convince administrators to keep physical education in the curriculum, even as an elective.⁹

Recently, there has been a positive trend in this regard. The State of Oregon recently enacted a law that will require, by the 2017-2018 school year, a minimum number of hours of physical activity during physical education classes in grades K-8, citing the increase in childhood obesity as the impetus for the reform.¹⁰ Based on a similar rationale, most other U.S. states have adopted legislation requiring at least some physical activity in schools.¹¹

Obesity rates worldwide are reaching disturbing levels.¹² In a recent review of data for school-aged youth in 34 countries, researchers found overweight and obesity rates particularly high in North America, Great Britain, and southwestern Europe. A number of studies have found a link between obesity and lower physical activity levels and more television viewing time.¹³

A Call to Action

Internationally, professionals have made efforts to improve the quality of physical education. The International Council for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport, and Dance (ICHPER-SD) was established in 1958 as an umbrella organization to advocate for physical education. In their “Advocacy Statement,” ICHPER-SD cites the United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund statement regarding the right of children for a “standard of physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development essential to engage purposefully in life’s functions.”¹⁴ This sounds very much like Ellen White’s statement in *Education* from decades earlier. ICHPER-SD seeks to create a positive environment in which every child will be physically educated, to empower each one to achieve his or her full potential.

ICHPER-SD has teamed up with many other organizations to promote physical education worldwide, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In 1978, UNESCO adopted a charter that includes 11 statements promoting physical education (see Table 1).¹⁵ Note the different components of physical education that are highlighted in this statement and its assertion that lifelong physical education is everyone's fundamental right.

Over the years, the General Conference Department of Education has also issued many statements promoting physical education in schools. The Seventh-day Adventist "Philosophy of Education" statement issued in 2003 includes the following words: "Adventist education imparts more than academic knowledge. It fosters a balanced development of the whole person—spiritually, intellectually, physically, and socially."¹⁶

Exercise the Brain

In *The Ministry of Healing*, Ellen White wrote, "The relation that exists between the mind and the body is very intimate."¹⁷ In *Education*, she added that, "Since the mind and the soul find expression through the body, both mental and spiritual vigor are in great degree dependent upon physical strength and activity; whatever promotes physical health, promotes the development of a strong mind and a well-balanced character."¹⁸

One of the most important reasons to include physical education in the curriculum is that *physical activity stimulates learning*. Carla Hannaford, in *Smart Moves*,¹⁹ discussed the positive link between physical activity and brain development, with reference to research dispelling the notion of a separate mind and body. Melvin Campbell, in an article in this journal, also highlighted the contribution of physical fitness to learning.²⁰ In recent studies by The California Endowment,²¹ researchers found that

higher levels of activity in physical education were associated with higher academic performance.

Choosing Well-Trained Physical Educators

Given the amount of research pointing to the importance of physical education, a major consideration is choosing qualified teachers to impart these ideals and to design well-balanced programs. The Seventh-day Adventist Health, Physical Education, Recreation Association (SDA-HPERA) recently issued a letter to church educational leaders in the North American

Division that stated, "We have noticed an increase in individuals being hired to teach physical education who have little professional training. This may be due in part to increased financial challenges our schools are facing. However, this practice can strain a school's ability to provide quality education and may pose risks to the school as well."²²

Quality physical education instruction should start with a commitment to this important component of true education. Whenever possible, Adventist schools should employ trained and properly licensed physical education teachers at all levels. Administrators

Table 1

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Charter

- The practice of physical education and sport is a fundamental right for all.
- Physical education and sport form an essential element of lifelong education in the overall education system.
- Physical education and sport programmes must meet individual and social needs.
 - Teaching, coaching, and administration of physical education and sport should be performed by qualified personnel.
 - Adequate facilities and equipment are essential to physical education and sport.
 - Research and evaluation are indispensable components of the development of physical education and sport.
 - Protection of the ethical and moral values of physical education and sport must be a constant concern for all.
 - Information and documentation help to promote physical education and sport.
 - The mass media should exert a positive influence on physical education and sport.
 - National institutions play a major role in physical education and sport.
 - International co-operation is a prerequisite for the universal and well-balanced promotion of physical education and sport.²³

NASPE National Standards & Guidelines for Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE)

Basic PETE Standards

Standard 1: Scientific and Theoretical Knowledge

Physical education teacher candidates know and apply discipline-specific scientific and theoretical concepts critical to the development of physically educated individuals.

Standard 2: Skill-Based and Fitness-Based Competence

Physical education teacher candidates are physically educated individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to demonstrate competent movement performance and health-enhancing fitness as delineated in NASPE's K-12 Standards.

Standard 3: Planning and Implementation

Physical education teacher candidates plan and implement developmentally appropriate learning experiences aligned with local, state, and national standards to address the diverse needs of all students.

Standard 4: Instructional Delivery and Management

Physical education teacher candidates use effective communication and pedagogical skills and strategies to enhance student engagement and learning.

Standard 5: Impact on Student Learning

Physical education teacher candidates utilize assessments and reflection to foster student learning and to inform instructional decisions.

Standard 6: Professionalism

Physical education teacher candidates demonstrate dispositions essential to becoming effective professionals.

Advanced PETE Standards

Standard 1: Professional Knowledge

Advanced physical education teacher candidates come to understand disciplinary content knowledge, the application of content knowledge to teaching physical education, and modes of inquiry that form the bases for physical education programs and instruction.

Standard 2: Professional Practice

Advanced physical education teacher candidates use content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge to design and conduct appropriate learning experiences that facilitate and enhance the growth of learners.

Standard 3: Professional Leadership

Advanced physical education teacher candidates are continuous, collaborative learners who further their own professional development and use their abilities to contribute to the profession.²⁴

must investigate candidates' academic backgrounds, and contact previous employers for information about each applicant. This is paramount in the dynamic, hands-on, and liability-prone realm of physical education.

Teacher training also needs attention. In designing their preservice programs, Adventist colleges and universities should understand and implement the professional preparation standards developed by both ICHPER-SD²⁵ and the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE). (See Table 2.) Summer and online courses will be helpful for teachers needing professional certification to teach physical education.

Hiring qualified physical education teachers is not always an option for small Adventist schools. However, because of liability issues, every teacher assigned to teach physical education must learn how to properly administer a physical education curriculum and appropriately manage risks. Teachers who lack appropriate training must be required to enroll in college-level or online physical education classes and work toward a teaching endorsement in the subject as quickly as possible. All physical education teachers must stay up to date on the latest guidelines in physical education and consult the most pertinent resources (see the next section). Also, many sports and activities have certifications that can be obtained through clinics and organizations. For example, in the United States, fitness certifications are available from leading organizations like the American Council on Education (ACE) or the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM).

How to Put Physical Education Into Action

Recognizing the important role of physical activity in the development of the whole person, what are the best

ways for Adventist schools to include movement experiences in the curriculum? Ellen White recommended the students obtain physical exercise by engaging in manual labor.²⁶ This is less of an option today due to mechanization and automation of work, and fewer jobs that require physical labor.²⁷ Whereas in Ellen White's era, most careers required manual labor, mechanization and automation in most developed countries have transformed the workplace so that most jobs are sedentary. This has also caused a decline in available manual labor opportunities and industries at Adventist schools. Accordingly, a wholistic education in 21st-century schools should lead students to enjoy appropriate physical activity and to choose to participate in an active lifestyle despite their sedentary nature of their careers.

The New Physical Education

Teachers should read widely to stay current on the “best practices” in physical education. The well-structured physical education program will incorporate a variety of approaches to ensure that all students engage in vigorous physical activity. The latest trend, referred to as the “new physical education,” represents a significant departure from the traditional focus on team sports, which tend to be exclusive and to stigmatize less-athletic students.²⁸ Focusing on traditional sports such as basketball, soccer, and rugby means that highly skilled students—the individuals who least need the practice—monopolize the program's resources and time. When the less-skilled students do get to play, they are often mocked and derided, which can lead them to associate physical activity with embarrassment and failure.

The “new physical education” focuses instead on cooperative activities and small-group games that all stu-



dents enjoy and that promote maximum learning for everyone. Thus, students experience a variety of activities, and the courses foster enjoyment of physical activity that will last a lifetime. Some examples:

- Students are introduced to rock climbing with a bouldering wall (low height) that allows enough stations for most students to practice some different holds while working on balance, coordination, and strength development.
- Volleyball skills are taught to groups of three students each; the objective is to forearm pass the ball to each group member, and then with the final pass, toss it into a hoop target on the ground.
- Locomotor skills such as hopping and sliding can be practiced using a

parachute, having everyone hold the edge and move in the same direction.

The goal of each of these examples is to (1) introduce students to a variety of fun activities, (2) enhance personal skills through practice, and (3) teach students how to cooperate. Approaches such as the Sport Education Model²⁹ and Teaching Games for Understanding³⁰ are enjoyable ways for students to participate in activities and learn sport skills, socialization, and other important lessons in physical education.

Resources

The best way for teachers to stay current in the field is to take courses and to consult popular Websites such as PECentral.com and PELinks.com.

Another valuable resource is the NASPE Forum (<http://www.pelinks4u.org/naspeforum/cgi-bin/discus/discus.cgi>), an active online community of physical education teachers. The Seventh-day Adventist Health, Physical Education, Recreation Association (SDA-HPERA) holds yearly meetings and keeps its members updated through its Website (<http://www.lasierra.edu/sdahpera/>), which also features information about how to join its mem-

ber listserv. Other important resources are the Seventh-day Adventist physical education curriculum materials such as: *North American Division Curriculum Guide: Physical Education K-12, Teacher Resource Manual – Elementary Section (K-8)*, and *Teacher Resource Manual – Secondary Section (9-12)*.³¹ Free online resources for physical education can be downloaded from CIRCLE (<http://circle.adventist.org>).³² These materials have been carefully constructed and screened to provide

excellent resources for all Adventist physical education teachers.

Risk Management Issues

As alluded to previously, one important focus of physical education is risk management. Table 3 includes safety recommendations for the physical education teacher.

In the United States, the most prominent organization for physical

Table 3

Managing Risk: Safety Recommendations in Physical Education

Physical activity is a high-risk endeavor. The following are recommended ways to reduce risk:

Scan the environment: Look for any hazards that may cause injury, such as wet surfaces, standing equipment in the playing area (e.g., volleyball standards), loose clothing or bags on the floor, uneven surfaces, and weather hazards (e.g., heat, lightning).

High-risk sports: Identify the riskiest sports and take extra steps to manage risk or remove them from the curriculum. These include gymnastics, dodge ball, flag football, softball, and contact sports.

Playground safety: Ensure that the playground is free of debris or other unsafe conditions. The National Playground Safety Institute (NPSI) endorses Certified Playground Safety Inspectors (CPSI) who can examine playgrounds. In addition, further safety resources are provided at <http://www.nrpa.org/playgroundsafety>.

Provide constant supervision: Direct supervision of students by the physical education teacher is paramount at all times. Even when giving individual instruction, the teacher should position himself or herself so that all students in the class are visible. The gym or playing field must never be left unsupervised.

Don't play with students: While it is good to model physical activity and students like to have teachers participate, instructors should avoid doing this. The maturity and skill level disparity between teacher and student creates a

potentially harmful situation, even if the teacher and student are of similar size and strength. In the event a student is injured by a teacher (e.g., colliding with a player or throwing a ball that strikes a student), the decision to participate will be difficult to defend, especially if a lawsuit ensues.

Attractive nuisances: These are equipment and facilities that attract people (outside of class use) and can cause personal injuries. Examples include soccer goals (young people like to swing on them), batting cages, gymnastic vaults, playground equipment, swimming pools, weight-lifting equipment, and treadmills.³³ Take steps to prevent unauthorized access to these items.

Transportation liability: Be sure to establish, in advance, clear policies for transporting students in official school vehicles. Contracting with transportation services is preferable to disburse liability. A teacher should never transport students in his or her own vehicle, since most personal vehicle insurance policies do not cover work-related accidents.

Building skills: Ensure that students master fundamental skills before progressing to activities requiring more-advanced skills, especially in high-risk sports.

Equipment inspection and replacement: Establish a regular schedule for inspecting and replacing or reconditioning equipment.

Match players appropriately: Match players for maturity, strength, and size during sports and games, especially those that involve contact.

education professionals is the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (AAHPERD), within which is the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE). Both organizations provide excellent professional resources and annual conferences for physical educators (see <http://www.aahperd.org>).

Of particular importance are the NASPE physical education standards and ICHPER-SD's "International Standards for Physical Education and Sport for School Children" (see Table 4). These are very important guidelines for teachers to follow in structuring a proper physical education program.

Summary

Because of the importance of physical activity in a healthy lifestyle, physical education should receive more attention in Seventh-day Adventist schools. Implementing the new physical education paradigm lays the groundwork for lifelong fitness and enjoyment of physical activity, helps combat obesity and other diseases linked to a sedentary lifestyle, and will improve students' quality of life. ✍



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Table 4

National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) Standards

Physical activity is critical to the development and maintenance of good health. The goal of physical education is to develop physically educated individuals who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity.

A physically educated person:

Standard 1: Demonstrates competency in motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities.

Standard 2: Demonstrates understanding of movement concepts, principles, strategies, and tactics as

they apply to the learning and performance of physical activities.

Standard 3: Participates regularly in physical activity.

Standard 4: Achieves and maintains a health-enhancing level of physical fitness.

Standard 5: Exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others in physical activity settings.

Standard 6: Values physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and/or social interaction.³⁴

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