

The Seventh- day Adventist

PHYSICAL EDUCATION PYRAMID

Currently, far too many people worldwide choose a sedentary lifestyle and have unhealthful eating habits. These two behaviors have produced substantial increases in the obesity rates in many parts of the world.¹ It used to be assumed that obesity was a problem only for wealthy countries, but today, obesity rates are increasing more rapidly in some developing nations than in more affluent areas.²

Throughout the world, the most significant factor driving increased levels of obesity has been reductions in the amount of daily physical activity. For adults, predisposing factors include the increased incidence of sedentary jobs, the use of motorized methods of transportation, use of labor-saving devices in the home, and reduced physical exertion due to leisure-time activities such as television watching and computer use.³

This trend is not limited to adults. Childhood obesity has also become an international public health concern.⁴ Obesity in children and youth is occurring in many nations, particularly in urban areas, where the prevalence of energy-dense cheap food and inactivity contribute to this trend.⁵

This increase in obesity within the younger segments of the population is particularly troubling because it exacerbates young people's susceptibility to chronic health-related problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and possibly cancer.⁶ This is one of the reasons that researchers

in the *New England Journal of Medicine* projected that for the first time in nearly a century, the younger generation may have a lower life expectancy than their parents.⁷

Public health officials recognize the importance of interventions in school settings because educating young people can prevent health problems in adulthood. Quality physical education classes can provide students with regular opportunities to experience physical activity while helping them to develop skill sets, aptitudes, and appreciation for a wide array of activities that they may continue to enjoy throughout their lives.

However, these desirable outcomes do not occur magically. Teachers must *intentionally* plan developmentally appropriate activities for their students using the principles of readiness⁸ and progression⁹; and administrators must make the commitment to hire people with formal training in physical education or ensure that teachers complete the appropriate collegiate courses during the summer or online. Providing students with "free time" or an extra recess period, or simply overseeing some

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games or exercises in an informal “toss out the ball” approach to physical education will not effectively meet this serious challenge to society at large, nor will it ensure that the needs of individual students are met, whether of the physically gifted or young people in need of help in the areas of fitness, coordination, and motor skills.

A Shift of Focus

Students who are particularly gifted in psychomotor skills often take advantage of the opportunity to further develop their abilities by joining gymnastic and/or sports teams. These groups receive public acclaim through exhibitions and officiated events where spectators come to cheer

physical education teachers to ensure that each of their students has ample opportunity to engage in planned, healthy, physical activity; and that instructors should investigate a variety of methods for accomplishing this goal.

Another outcome of these convention discussions was the formalization of the *Seventh-day Adventist Physical Education Pyramid*¹⁰ that was presented in 2008 at the national SDA-HPERA convention in Texas.

Historical Context

The first physical education majors to graduate from a Seventh-day Adventist college were Robert Monti Reynolds and Helen Ward at Walla Walla College (College Place, Washington)



Figure 1. The Seventh-day Adventist Physical Education Pyramid

them on. Even in informal games, they are the first picked and most likely to enhance their skills through practice and exercise.

It is understandable that at times the physical education teacher’s focus may shift toward the school’s “elite” gymnastic or sport teams. After all, the community sees and appreciates these types of programs, and they are believed to build school spirit. Unfortunately, this reorientation of priorities usually results in the teacher’s investing less thought, effort, and planning in regular physical education classes, thereby depriving those students of the full focus of their instructor.

This “shift of focus” from classes that enroll every student to programs that focus on after-school team sports for elite student athletes was a topic of concern and discussion for attendees at three recent Seventh-day Adventist Health, Physical Education, Recreation Association (SDA-HPERA) conventions. The resulting consensus: *It is the primary duty of all*

in 1949.¹¹ Many other Adventist colleges added physical education and health majors over the next few years, and over time, the number of physical education professionals in the church continued to grow.

Professional growth opportunities for college physical educators were sponsored by the North American Division (NAD) at the summer sessions for Adventist college teachers in 1957, 1961, 1965, 1968, and 1976. By the mid-1970s, most Adventist college teachers were attending discipline-specific national conventions, so the summer sessions were discontinued. Whenever possible, Adventist physical education teachers met informally in the evenings when they attended the national convention for the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance. While the AAHPERD meetings provided good information and networking opportunities during the day, attendees desired presentations specifically related to the values of the Ad-

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ventist educational system.

In the fall of 1980, Rudolf (Rudy) Klimes, the NAD's health and temperance director, visited the La Sierra campus of Loma Linda University (Riverside, California) to discuss with Walt Hamerslough, then chair of the Health, Physical Education, and Recreation Department of the college, Klimes' goals to promote healthy lifestyle education. Upon learning that physical educators from many Adventist colleges attended the national AAHPERD convention each spring, Klimes offered to have his office sponsor a dinner meeting for convention attendees at the next meeting in Boston.

Thus, on April 14, 1981, 31 Adventist elementary, secondary, and college-level physical educators from across the U.S. met with Klimes to discuss issues relating to health and physical education and to explore the possibility of forming a professional organization.¹² During these meetings, attendees voted to organize the Seventh-day Adventist Health, Physical Education, Recreation Association (SDA-HPERA).

While there are several professional organizations in the fields of health and physical education, it is the integration of a spiritual dimension in its professional efforts that makes the SDA-HPERA distinctive.¹³ The mission statement for the SDA-HPERA provides a sense of what the organization deems important:

"Our mission is to promote: health and physical education in the context of contemporary Seventh-day Adventism; the role that regular physical activity plays in the pursuit of lifelong health and well-being; athletics in a Christ-centered lifestyle; the integration of faith and learning; and the development of the whole person—mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally and socially."¹⁴

The SDA-HPERA mission provides context for the development of the *Seventh-day Adventist Physical Education Pyramid*, which provides a visual characterization of the priorities of the organization (see Figure 1 on page 35).

Quality physical education classes comprise the foundational tier of the Seventh-day Adventist Physical Education Pyramid for elementary and secondary schools. Providing quality physical education within the K-12 curriculum means offering developmentally appropriate classes for all students. These classes should equip students with skill sets and provide positive experiences to foster higher levels of physical activity while they are in school, in order for this to become a lifelong habit.

The second tier involves offering a quality intramural pro-

gram as a part of the school's extra-curricular activities for all students who elect to participate. Intramural activities provide opportunities for students to participate with their schoolmates in organized sports activities at a recre-

ational level. These activities, which are scheduled at lunchtime or after school and are supervised by the physical education teacher, help students develop friendships and social skills that will serve them in a wide array of life situations and encourage them to be physically active.

Once these two foundational levels have been solidly established and are effectively functioning, the next tier provides a third opportunity. Tier 3 is where the physical education teacher serves as facilitator for the school, local churches, and the community to promote physical activity opportunities outside school hours. Examples may be as simple as opening the gym once per week for community basketball games, sponsoring physical activities for "family time," or promoting healthy eating patterns by holding nutrition seminars. The school may also partner with other health-related organizations in the community for more extensive programming if desired.

If the school has the necessary financial, facility, and personnel resources *and* believes an athletic program would contribute to its mission, then it may wish to add the fourth tier of the pyramid; interscholastic sports programs or gymnastics activities to help physically gifted students develop their talents. These programs have the potential for significant positive outcomes but must be intentionally counter-cultural and consistent with the mission and values of the school and its constituents in order to ensure that the program is distinctive and effective. An important resource that schools may utilize to help facilitate these goals is the *Guidelines for Seventh-day Adventist Athletics*¹⁵ published by the SDA-HPERA in 2003.

Challenges

Regrettably, in some schools, the "pyramid" may actually be upside down—athletics have become the primary focus in the physical portion of the body/mind/spirit triad. Concern about this trend was voiced again at the March 2011 SDA-HPERA national convention.

Some administrators and community members have thought that in the era of tight school budgets, athletics programs will generate constituent enthusiasm and support more effectively than physical education classes, which are part of the

regular curriculum. As a result, quality physical education for all of their students has been sacrificed on the altar of athletics.

Another challenge is the occasional practice by Adventist K-12 schools of hiring uncertified persons rather than trained professionals to teach physical education. This concern was recognized by the SDA-HPERA by a formal action at their national convention in Kettering, Ohio, in 2001¹⁶ and by a letter¹⁷ sent to union directors of education in the North American Division offering suggestions for providing quality physical education to students in K-12 schools.

Unfortunately, the general education curriculum within Adventist higher education demonstrates a body-mind-spirit triangle that is more accurately depicted by a very narrow isosceles triangle with the narrow side representing the “body” portion rather than an equilateral triangle with each side the same length. We need to increase the opportunities for all college students to be more physically fit and active to help ensure that their body temple supports rather than detracts from their mental and spiritual faculties. Here, too, Adventist schools have the opportunity to “turn students on” to lifelong fitness activities.

Opportunity

Following the principles of the Seventh-day Adventist Physical Education Pyramid will ensure that Adventist physical education programs effectively help students to reduce their susceptibility to the obesity epidemic that is sweeping our world and equip them for a lifestyle that includes a variety of sports and fitness activities. The Pyramid provides both a philosophical foundation for and practical assistance in designing Adventist school curricula by ensuring that ALL students are enrolled in high-quality physical education classes.

If the school has met the basic goals (the bottom three pyramid tiers) and has the additional financial and human resources; and if it has leaders who subscribe to the principles outlined in the *Guidelines for Seventh-day Adventist Athletics*, the board and principal may elect to begin or to continue a sports program as a value-added extracurricular activity. However, if the three foundational levels are not in place, the school administration must choose the good of the many over the enhancement of the few and not offer after-school varsity and team sports until they are able to provide the foundational levels of the pyramid to their students and community. ☞



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