

Physical education's future in Ontario schools

One full-time physical education teacher is needed to provide phys ed classes for all the students in an average-sized Ontario elementary school. But because funding for phys ed teachers is dependent on preparation time, only schools well above the Ontario average size tend to have full-time phys ed teachers.

A multitude of factors contribute the decline in activity levels

in young people. Many no longer walk to and from school and many spend hours a day in front of computer or TV screens. At a time when costs to participate in organized sports outside school have skyrocketed, schools are the one place where *all* children and youth have access to the physical education which may form life-long and life-saving habits of physical fitness.

what schools told us...

"A tremendous amount of construction has taken place over the last six months to make the school more accessible and safe. Our school is unique in that we do not have a gymnasium. We have an empty classroom where classes can do some physical activity such as aerobics, yoga, etc. and it is used for some DPA activities. Most physical activity has to be done outside. All our classes contain split grades. The two 'senior' classes travel once per

week by bus (20-25 minutes) to use the gym of the closest school. I feel parents have not been vocal about the lack of a gymnasium for fear of their small school being closed down."

An elementary school in Renfrew County DSB

"We are an inner-city school of low socio-economic, often single-parent families. This year our new school gym will open. Our school did not have a gym before."

An elementary school in Trillium Lakelands DSB

physical education

from The Annual Report on Ontario's Public Schools 2008



people for
Education

BECAUSE EDUCATION MATTERS MOST

The full report is available at www.peopleforeducation.com.

People for Education is a registered charity working to support public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools.

P.O. Box 64, Station P, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2S6

phone: 416-534-0100 fax: 416-536-0100

e-mail: p4e@peopleforeducation.com website: www.peopleforeducation.com

physical education

Canadian children and youth get a failing grade in their level of physical activity, according to Active Healthy Kids Canada.

Research shows that students are more likely to receive regular and rigorous physical education when they are taught by a specialist physical education teacher, but less

than half of Ontario elementary schools have these specialists.

Access to physical education teachers inconsistent

More elementary schools have physical education teachers this year, but most are part-time; and areas with a high number of smaller schools are much less likely to have them. In the GTA, 72% of elementary schools have a part-time or full-time physical education teacher, compared to 27% of Southwestern and 29% of Northern elementary schools.

Researchers have found that where regular classroom teachers must deliver the physical education curriculum, gym periods may be missed, and many classroom teachers do not have the knowledge or skills to deliver a program of vigorous physical activity.

Test score pressure on physical education

American researchers are finding that putting pressure on schools to raise students' test scores can result in reductions

Physical education in Ontario schools in 2008

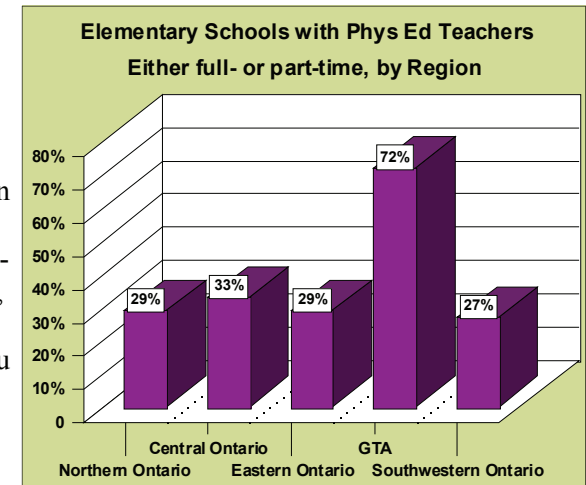
- ❑ Ontario education policy requires students to take physical education classes from kindergarten to Grade 9.
- ❑ 44% of elementary schools have a physical education teacher, a small but steady increase over the past three years.
- ❑ Elementary schools with full-time physical education teachers have, on average, 465 students. The average elementary school has 331 students.
- ❑ Elementary schools report they face challenges complying with the provincially mandated Daily Physical Activity. It is difficult to fit the time into the school day, often hard to find adequate gym or classroom space to be active in, and staff lack training to offer the daily physical activities.

to physical education time. Yet there is a growing body of research illustrating that exercise can boost the brain power in children and adolescents. Harvard University professor, Dr. John J. Ratey, states, "The exercise itself doesn't make you smarter, but it puts the brain of learners in the optimal position for them to learn."

In response to a request for input into the review of the physical education curriculum in March 2008, parents expressed concerns about the level of physical education in their schools. They said that gym classes are sometimes cancelled because of student misbehavior or because there is "no time" given the other curriculum requirements and that some teachers are not providing the required physical health education instruction.

The Province's Daily Physical Activity policy

Daily Physical Activity is a provincially mandated program introduced two years ago, which mandates 20 min-



utes of activity per day for students in elementary school. It is not intended to replace physical education classes which follow a proscribed curriculum in each grade; instead it is meant to be a part of the regular classroom day.

This year for the first time we asked elementary schools if students were receiving the mandated daily physical activity. While 98% of schools said they had implemented the program, they said it was a challenge to find time in the school day to do it. Schools also cited the need for teacher training, adequate space in the classroom or school, and resources to purchase needed equipment.