

HEALTH & PHYSICAL EDUCATION

From the People for Education Annual Report
on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools 2011



HEALTH & PHYSICAL EDUCATION

To keep our brains at peak performance, our bodies need to work hard.

John J. Ratey M.D., Spark: *The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise*

A healthy school environment helps children learn and contributes to life-long patterns of fitness and good health.

But fewer than 10% of Canadian children are getting the level of physical activity recommended in Canadian and international guidelines,¹ and a quarter of Canadian children and youth are overweight or obese.²

Ontario has some promising new strategies to improve students' overall health, but still lags behind other jurisdictions in its health and physical education requirements.

In Ontario, health and physical education (H&PE), which includes 20 minutes of daily physical activity, is mandatory until the end of Grade 8, and students require one secondary school physical education credit to graduate. In contrast, British Columbia and Quebec require at least 30 minutes of activity every day right up until the end of high school.³ And in Finland, where there is an increased recognition of the importance of health education, the percentage of "lesson hours" per week for Health and Personal Functionality (a combination of health and physical education and home economics) is being increased to be equal with the number of hours spent on mathematics.⁴ The province does provide a Program Enhancement Grant (see The Arts) to cover extra costs for things such as physical and outdoor education programs, but many boards use the funding to cover core costs.

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION SPECIALISTS

Research shows that health and physical education specialists not only ensure students have more hours of physical education classes, but that the physical education itself is of a higher quality.⁵

This year, 43% of Ontario's elementary schools have a specialist health and physical education teacher, and most of them work part-time. This is a slight increase since 1997/98, when 41% of elementary schools had health and physical education teachers. But these specialists are not evenly distributed around the province. Schools with higher enrolments have funding for more teachers, so they are more likely to

From the [2011 People for Education Annual Report](#)

QUICK FACTS FOR 2010/11

- 43% of elementary schools have a specialist health and physical education (H&PE) teacher, compared to 41% in 1997/98.
- 72% of GTA elementary schools have an H&PE teacher, compared to 25% of Northern Ontario schools.
- 16% of elementary schools with specialist H&PE teachers report that their teachers have no special qualifications.

have specialist health and physical education teachers. For this reason, in the GTA, where schools tend to have higher than average enrolments, 72% of elementary schools report a full- or part-time specialist health and physical education teacher. Outside the GTA, only 1/3 or fewer schools have these specialists.

WHAT MAKES A SPECIALIST?

This year, People for Education asked schools to identify the qualifications of their specialist health and physical education teachers.

Among the schools that reported having specialist health and physical education teachers, 55% of specialists have taken Ontario College of Teachers-certified [Additional Qualification](#) (AQ) courses, 29% have degrees in physical education or a university specialization in physical education and 16% have no special qualifications. Schools report that some teachers have more than one qualification.

WORKING TOWARD HEALTHY SCHOOLS

The Ministry of Education has started implementing a comprehensive strategy to develop "[Healthy Schools](#)" for Ontario. The strategy includes new curriculum, a new food and beverage policy and a provincial framework to help parents, students and staff develop Healthy Schools. A Healthy School supports healthy eating, more physical activity, bullying prevention, and provides information about healthy growth and development, substance abuse and mental health. Over 2,200 schools have participated in the Healthy Schools Recognition Program.⁶

The new School Food and Beverage Policy—which comes into effect in September 2011—sets out nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold in elementary and secondary schools in the province,⁷ and requires that 80% of foods being sold in schools or served at special events should be “healthiest” choices—highly nutritious and low in fat, sodium and sugar.

The new curriculum, introduced in 2010 in elementary schools and coming next year for secondary schools, is comprehensive in its approach to H&PE and covers all aspects of young people’s health—from mental health and well-being to sexual health and physical fitness. There were some objections to the examples provided in the sex education component of the healthy living strand of the new elementary H&PE curriculum, so it was withdrawn until further consultation can be held.

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The benefits of physical activity for student learning and engagement with school are clear,⁸ as is the long-term correlation between poverty and poor health outcomes.⁹ But in Ontario, access to sports and physical activity may be at least partially dependent on family income.

Renovated playgrounds are associated with more active play,¹⁰ but 47% of Ontario’s schools depend on fundraising for playgrounds and nearly two-thirds of school councils fundraise for sports.¹¹ In secondary schools, 41% charge fees for health and physical education classes and 73% charge Athletic fees, which range from \$10 to \$1,800. This raises serious equity concerns.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools can play a key role in promoting physical activity, healthy eating and overall health, including mental, sexual and social health.

People for Education recommends

- the province provide specific and targeted funding for health and physical education programs, as well as specialists in elementary and secondary school,
- the province ensure the availability of professional development and support in H&PE for generalist teachers, and
- require boards to report on programs funded through the Program Enhancement Grant.

WHAT PRINCIPALS TOLD US . . .

We are an inner city school, and many of our students come from low-income families. We supply our students with healthy snack bins (fresh fruit, cut-up carrots, 100% fruit drinks, etc.) in the classroom every morning, and by the end of the day, the bins are empty. We have found feeding the students helps with behaviour and learning.

Elementary School, Simcoe Muskoka CDSB

We are a “Healthy Living School” that was originally started with support and financing from OPHEA and other community grants. We continue to recognize and implement Healthy + Active components with our students and our community through nutritional programs and extracurricular activities during and after school.

Elementary School, Simcoe County DSB

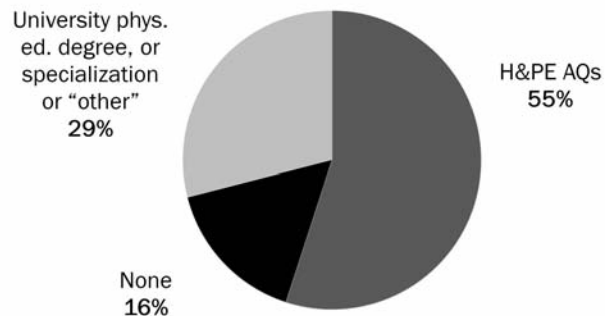
Classroom teachers are also scheduled to teach a class in order to provide the programme as well as planning time.

Elementary School, Peel DSB

Each homeroom teacher does their own P.E.

Elementary School, Waterloo Region DSB

Specialized health and physical education teacher qualifications in elementary schools



NOTES

- 1 Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology. (2011, January 24). New Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines released [press release]. Retrieved from <http://www.csep.ca/CMFiles/Guidelines/CSEP%20PAG%20Launch%20-%20National%20Release%20-%20FINAL%20-%2019Jan.pdf>
- 2 Colley, R. Garriguet, D. Janssen, I. Craig, C. Clarke, J., & Tremblay, M. (2011). Physical activity of Canadian children and youth: Accelerometer results from the 2007 to 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey. *Statistics Canada Health Reports*, 22(1). Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/2011001/article/11397-eng.pdf>
- 3 Active Healthy Kids Canada. (2011). *Don't let this be the most activity our kids get after school: Active Healthy Kids report card*. Toronto, ON: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.active-healthykids.ca/ecms.ashx/ReportCard2011/AHKCRReportCard20110429FINAL.pdf>, page 34.
- 4 Lankinen, T. (2010, September). *Case study/Finland*. Paper presented at the Building Blocks for Education Reform: Whole System Reform Summit, Toronto, ON. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/bb4e/Finland_CaseStudy2010.pdf, page 14.
- 5 McKenzie, T.L., Sallis, J.F., Kolody, B., & Faucette, F.N. (1997). Long-term effects of a physical education curriculum and staff development program: SPARK. *Research Quarterly for Exercise & Sport*, 68(4), 280-91. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9421840>
- 6 Government of Ontario. (2011). Healthy Schools - Healthy Schools Recognition Program. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/healthyschools/search.asp>
- 7 Government of Ontario. (2010). Policy/Program Memorandum No. 150. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/150.html>
- 8 Willms, J.D. (2003). *Student engagement at school: A sense of belonging and participation*. Paris, France: OECD. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/42/35/33689437.pdf>; National Research Council Institute of Medicine. (2004). *Engaging schools: Fostering high school students' motivation to learn*. Washington: National Academies Press. Retrieved from http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=10421&page=R2; Trudeau, F., & Shephard, R.J. (2010). Relationships of physical activity to brain health and the academic performance of schoolchildren. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*, 4, 138-150.
- 9 See Public Health Agency of Canada (2010). What determines health. Retrieved from <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/determinants/index-eng.php>, which lists income and social status as the number one determinant of health; Bengoechea, E.G., Sabiston, C.M., Ahmed, R., & Farnoush, M. (2010). Exploring links to unorganized and organized physical activity during adolescence: The role of gender, socioeconomic status, weight status, and enjoyment of physical education. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 81, 7-16.
- 10 See note 3, page 37.
- 11 People for Education. (2010). *The 2010 report on Ontario's school councils*. Retrieved from <http://www.peopleforeducation.com/reportonschoolcouncils2010.pdf>, page 14.



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

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To read the full 2011 report, go to
<http://peopleforeducation.com/annualreport/school2011.pdf>