



The Research File

Information for professionals from the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute

The Case for Quality Daily Physical Education

The Ontario Medical Association reports that Canadian children and youth are up to 40 percent less active today than they were 30 years ago. In fact, the 1988 Campbell Survey on Well-Being in Canada found that only 10 percent of our young people are active at an amount and intensity that may be required for health.

Studies show:

- a significant decline in physical activity after the age of 12, with girls generally less active than boys
- 60 percent of our youth do not meet average fitness standards
- 40 percent have at least one risk factor for heart disease.

Numerous organizations are working together to help reverse these trends, including the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute and the Active Living Alliance for Children and Youth. Another major partner is the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (CAHPER). With ongoing support from Fitness Canada, CAHPER's Quality Daily Physical Education (QDPE) Program is now in the midst of a full-scale public education campaign.

The Short and Long of It

When you examine the research, QDPE makes good sense. Beyond the obvious physical health benefits of regular activity, there are many other reasons why QDPE should be a cornerstone of the curriculum in *every* school.

In the short term, exercise leads to a state of relaxation which lasts up to two hours. This is accompanied by improved concentration, enhanced creativity and memory, better task performance and problem solving, and improved mood state.

The long-term benefits include increased self-confidence and self image, relief of frustration, reduced aggression, and decreased anxiety and depression.

In the school setting, these attributes can help to create an *environment* conducive to learning and a readiness to learn on the part of the *individual*.

Making the Most of School Time

Studies confirm that increased time for physical education will not jeopardize academic learning. Quite the opposite is true.

- The "granddaddy" of all research in this area was begun in Vanves, France, in 1951. Academic time was reduced, with the time devoted to physical education increased to a full third of the weekly timetable. By 1960, results showed that the academic performance, discipline, enthusiasm, fitness, and health of students in the experimental



classes were superior to those of the control groups.

- Follow-up studies in a number of Canadian cities—including Trois-Rivières, North York, and Victoria—showed similar results. The six-year study in Trois-Rivières, for example, found that students in grades two to six receiving five extra hours of physical activity per week achieved *higher* marks than regular-program students.

Clearly, a better balance in educational activities leads to better performance all around.

Doing Our Part

In spite of these known benefits, there is still much to be done. Only about one-third of schools in Canada provide daily physical education for even a portion of their students. Less than four percent of schools have earned the School Recognition Award for QDPE.

We can all play a part in our own communities to bring about change. To get started, contact CAHPER for more information on QDPE, including a selected reference list and "how-to" tips for effective lobbying.

Contact Roger Passmore, Director, QDPE, CAHPER, 1600 James Naismith Drive, Gloucester, Ontario K1B 5N4 (613) 748-5622 Fax: 748-5707.

Call to Action

There is much that we all can do to help the cause. We can ...

- Learn more about the importance of QDPE.
- Determine the status of physical education in local schools. Does it emphasize a fun, social atmosphere and active living rather than just traditional team sports and competition?
- Find out where teachers, administrators, and trustees stand on the issue.

Then, push for change where it is needed ...

- Develop community action groups.
- Keep decision-makers informed.
- Write letters. Write the local newspaper.
- Meet with school officials and politicians.
- Ask for support *and* action!

