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STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
LANSING



THOMAS D. WATKINS, JR.  
SUPERINTENDENT OF  
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

November 26, 2002

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Thomas D. Watkins, Jr., Chairman

SUBJECT: Approval of Position Paper on Safety Concerns in Physical Education  
Classes Grades PreK-12

The Michigan Department of Education and the Physical Education Safety Advisory Group, contracted with Nancy M. Giardina, Ed.D from the Department of Movement Science at Grand Valley State University to provide teachers and administrators with fundamental recommendations regarding safety concerns and practices for conducting physical education classes in grades PreK-12. This position statement and recommendations were developed after reviewing research journals, physical education preparation textbooks, principles of safety, safety guidelines from American and Canadian professional physical education associations, as well as input from reviews (Abreu et al, 1999; Dougherty, 1993).

It is our expectation that this position paper will help raise awareness and understanding of safety issues and that the implementation of these recommendations will decrease the risk of unintentional injuries for students in the class setting. This paper will be made available to school personnel and the general public on our website.

The Safety Guidelines will be an important tool for physical education staff as they work to further their professional development through a more detailed understanding of fundamental safety recommendations and legal liability to reduce unintentional injuries during physical education and physical activities.

It is recommended that the State Board of Education approve the Position Paper on Safety Concerns in Physical Education Classes Grades PreK-12 as attached to the Superintendent's memorandum dated November 26, 2002.

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608 WEST ALLEGAN STREET • P.O. BOX 30008 • LANSING, MICHIGAN 48909  
www.michigan.gov • (517) 373-3324

# **POSITION PAPER**

## **Safety Concerns in Physical Education Classes Grades PreK-12**

**The Michigan Department of Education  
in cooperation with  
The Physical Education Safety Advisory Group  
The Michigan Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance  
The Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports  
The Michigan Fitness Foundation  
and  
The Michigan Department of Community Health**

**September 26, 2002**

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### **AUTHOR**

Nancy M. Giardina, Ed.D  
Department of Movement Science  
Science and Mathematics Division  
Grand Valley State University

## **The Physical Education Safety Advisory Group**

Ray Allen – Michigan State University  
Gail Cotter – Walled Lake Schools  
Doug Curry – Michigan Assoc. of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance  
Karl Dobronski – Detroit Federation of Teachers  
Steve Garrison – Waterford Public Schools  
Joyce Krause – Wayne State University  
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Eunice Moore – Detroit Public Schools  
Abby Mortensen – Michigan Department of Community Health  
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Kenneth Stringer, D.O. – Michigan State University  
Elizabeth Coke Haller – Michigan Department of Education  
Al Craven – Michigan Assoc. of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance  
Tom Johnson – Michigan Assoc. of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance  
Pat Van Volkinburg – Michigan Assoc. of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance  
Su Nottingham – Michigan Assoc. of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance

# **POSITION STATEMENT: SAFETY CONCERNS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASS GRADES PREK-12**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this paper is to give teachers and administrators fundamental recommendations regarding safety concerns and practices for conducting physical education classes in grades PreK-12. The paper will focus on the physical education curriculum program rather than recess or intramural and school sports, although many of the recommendations would apply to them as well.

These recommendations focus on legal liability concepts related to negligence, instruction, supervision, and the environment, which includes facilities and equipment. These common safety themes were addressed in numerous articles, documents, and presentation textbooks for physical education professionals. Physical education teachers and school administrators need to be aware of their legal responsibilities and implement appropriate practices to create safe conditions for students in grades PreK-12.

It is important to note that implementing these recommendations will not guarantee the complete elimination of unintentional injuries in physical education classes. However, awareness, understanding, and implementation of these recommendations should decrease the risk of unintentional injuries for students in the class setting.

## **SAFETY LITERATURE IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS IN SCHOOL SETTINGS**

This position statement and recommendations were developed after reviewing research journals, physical education preparation textbooks, principles of safety, safety guidelines from American and Canadian professional physical education associations, as well as input from reviewers (Abreu et al, 1999; Dougherty, 1993). Safety literature in PreK-12 physical education classes can be categorized into four broad areas of safety concern, including: general safety concerns for school students (van der Smissen, 1990; Chan et al, 1996), student safety while participating in school sport activities (Borkowski, 1998; Carpenter, 2000; Athletic Administration, 1998), student safety on school playgrounds (Beckwith, 1990; Hudson, 1997; Smith, 1998; Thompson & Hudson, 1997), and safety concerns for students participating in physical education classes (Bucher, 1987; Darst, 1997; Hart, 1992 & 1993; Horine, 1985; Rink, 1998; Siedentop, 1991).

Several common themes such as the establishment of general and emergency safety procedures and guidelines for reducing the risk of injury to students and faculty, knowledge of legal responsibilities, and context specific safety issues emerged from the literature in these areas. A further review of the context specific literature revealed numerous safety guidelines and procedures that are activity or sport specific. For example, specific information regarding safety

issues can be obtained from the USA Gymnastics Safety Handbook (1998), Safety in American Football (1997), Outdoor Recreation Safety (1998), and numerous other sport organizations and associations.

Most of the safety discussions in this review are linked to the prevention of tort claims in the legal process. Tort claims are claims of personal injury due to negligence of a teacher or other school personnel. Physical education teachers and program administrators need to be aware of all safety issues related to instruction and supervision, as well as the environment. Therefore, the position statement and recommendations presented in this paper were developed based on the conclusion that physical educators and administrators could benefit from utilizing this information to provide safer learning experiences for PreK-12 students. The primary goal of this position statement is to minimize unintentional injuries during physical education classes.

## **SAFETY CONCERNS AND INSTRUCTION**

Physical education teachers select age and developmentally appropriate learning activities for students and provide appropriately sequenced instruction and activities that reflect a logical progression across lessons within units of activity.

Teachers should remind students of potential hazards or risks and provide feedback as they participate in learning activities.

It is recommended that teachers:

1. Select learning activities that are identified in the school's physical education curriculum, which should be aligned with Michigan K-12 Physical Education Content Standards & Benchmarks.
2. Clearly present learning activities in daily lesson and unit plans.
3. Demonstrate current knowledge and skills related to the content and instructional techniques for assigned activities.
4. Assess student readiness to participate in specific learning activities.
5. Provide feedback to students during instruction.
6. Allow time for students to make verbal and written adjustments to the lesson to minimize unintentional injury.
7. Promote safety awareness by providing continuous warnings and reminders about potential hazards to students before and during participation in learning activities.

It is recommended that administrators:

1. Provide instructional supervision to physical education teachers to facilitate the implementation of the school's physical education curriculum.
2. Provide staff development opportunities for safety in physical education for teachers.
3. Support appropriate development and/or adoption of written safety guidelines for each activity or sport in the curriculum.
4. Make district/building safety guidelines available to teachers, students, and parents.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SAFE SUPERVISION**

Physical education teachers supervise students with safety in mind. Effective supervision is often described as two-dimensional: general and specific. General supervision refers to the broad supervision of an entire physical education environment. In this dimension, the teacher can see the entire class, detect students using improper procedures, and determine if students are engaged in potentially hazardous behavior. Specific supervision refers to interactions between the teacher and one student or a small group of students. In this dimension, the teacher can provide feedback to an individual student, or the group, to reinforce safe procedures or provide direct support to a student doing a difficult or advanced skill.

To minimize unintentional injuries, physical education teachers provide supervision in both dimensions. Administrators must facilitate supervision by providing adequate teaching staff immediately before, during, and after class.

It is recommended that teachers:

1. Develop and follow written safety procedures and policies for student behavior that includes appropriate conduct before and after class, in locker rooms, gymnasiums, and other indoor and outdoor teaching areas.
2. Position themselves to maximize visual contact of students.
3. Review the general safety policies and frequently remind students of correct safety procedures.

It is recommended that administrators:

1. Assign a sufficient number of teachers to supervise students immediately before, during, and after physical education class sessions.
2. Follow, promote, and enforce general safety procedures and policies for student behavior in physical education class.



## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A SAFE PHYSICAL EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT**

Physical education teachers provide a safe environment for students in class settings. Preparing the learning environment prior to class is one aspect of this. It is important to inspect the facility or teaching area for potential hazards and proper function, including both indoor and outdoor facilities. Indoor facilities include spaces such as locker rooms, main gymnasiums, auxiliary gymnasiums, all-purpose rooms, weight rooms, dance studios, swimming pools, rock climbing facilities, and classrooms. Outdoor facilities may include spaces such as designated tracks, sport fields, general field space, blacktop areas, fitness trails, racquet sports courts, playgrounds, and parking lots used for instruction.

The use of off-school property for instructional purposes has special considerations. For example, town, city, or county park property adjacent to school property may be used for instruction. Physical education teachers should ensure that these facilities have been inspected prior to use.

In addition to preparing facilities, physical education teachers need to be conscious of how they will use the space. Unintentional injury may be caused by inappropriate use of space. Typical examples of misuse are conducting class when inappropriate equipment is dangerously close, setting finish lines too close to interior walls, or not having an adequate buffer zone between multiple activities. Administrators should help teachers prepare by addressing facility concerns when reported by teachers.

It is recommended that teachers:

1. Inspect facilities before and after each physical education class for hazardous or potentially hazardous conditions.
2. Implement procedures to prevent unintentional injuries in facilities where potentially unsafe conditions exist.
3. Organize space in a manner that allows for an adequate buffer zone between activities.

It is recommended that administrators address physical facility concerns when reported by physical education teachers, students, parents, or community members.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SAFE PHYSICAL EDUCATION EQUIPMENT**

Physical education teachers select and provide class equipment that prevents unintentional injuries and maximizes safety during use. Providing safe equipment may include selecting, purchasing, reconditioning, repairing, and replacing equipment.

Teachers select the appropriate equipment by considering the age and ability of the students. Teachers make selections and provide safety equipment specific to each unit of activity in the physical education curriculum. This includes, but is not limited to: helmets, protective eye wear, face masks, goalie pads, shin guards, etc. Administrators should review equipment requests, facilitate the teachers' selections and equipment maintenance, and closely review equipment concerns when teachers report them.

It is recommended that teachers:

1. Select and request the purchase of developmentally appropriate equipment.
2. Visually inspect physical education equipment daily and before and after each class session.
3. Instruct students on how to inspect the equipment and remind them to do so before using the equipment.
4. Provide safety equipment for specific sports and require its use during instruction and play.

It is recommended that administrators:

1. Respond to reported equipment concerns as soon as possible.
2. Facilitate equipment purchases to meet safety guidelines or specifications.
3. Facilitate inspections and checks to meet the safety guidelines or specifications.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING GENERAL SAFETY PROCEDURES FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSES**

Physical education curricular programs have general safety procedures and policies that are generic to student safety. They include: development of a safety committee, an emergency action plan, access to a phone or hand held radio, means to obtain student medical information, an accident reporting method, facilities and equipment inspections, activity specific safety checklists, and safety signs. In addition, safety policies regarding student behavior should be communicated and reinforced throughout the school year, including: appropriate clothing, footwear, jewelry, eye wear, and conduct when using facilities, locker room, and equipment.

It is recommended that teachers:

1. Develop and post student behavior safety policies for physical education classes.
2. Develop and use activity specific safety checklists daily.
3. Communicate all physical education safety policies and procedures to students, and parents/guardians at the beginning of each semester and for each specialty unit that requires additional policies and procedures to be reinforced (i.e. archery, gymnastics, swimming, etc.).

It is recommended that administrators:

1. Establish a physical education safety sub-committee as a part of a Coordinated School Health Team or School Improvement Team.
2. Facilitate the development of an emergency action plan for physical education classes, taking into consideration indoor, outdoor, aquatic, and community activities and facilities.
3. Support and post safety signs in physical education facilities and on appropriate equipment.

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