


Implementing Quality Physical Education and Physical Activity in K-12 Schools

Providing training and resources to Physical Education teachers across Michigan improved the health education and physical activity environment for students. For example, this support encouraged the introduction of a novel program in the Saulte Area Public School District designed to address student health challenges.


Problem



For the past several years, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has consistently heard from Physical Education (PE) teachers in the field that they don't feel valued in the school and their content area is easily done away with. The teachers feel they are not viewed as a valuable member of the school staff. PE time is often viewed as prep time for other teachers or a place for students to expend a little energy during the school day. In conjunction with this, we have noticed through data and anecdotally that there has been a decrease in PE classes and opportunities for students to engage in physical activity throughout the school day. Michigan's YRBS data from 2013 indicated that 50.3% of high school students did not get the recommended amount of 60 minutes of physical activity per day, 34.1% play 3 or more hours of video games a day and 73% did not go to PE classes on all 5 days of the school week. The 2017 data has seen an increase in all these numbers to 54%, 42.6%, 78%. While Michigan has a strong comprehensive model policy passed by the State Board of Education, the legislation that requires schools to implement these practices for their students is vague.

Michigan districts have a great deal of autonomy in how they operate therefore there are little to no consistent practices in the state.


Intervention



In 2013, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) received the State Public Health Actions to Prevent and Control Diabetes, Heart Disease, Obesity and Associated Risk Factors and Promote School Health funding, also known as 1305. Part of this funding was required to be utilized to partner with MDE for school health initiatives. The School Health and Safety Unit chose the goal of; "Implement Quality Physical Education and Physical Activity in K-12 Schools". MDE decided to bring the science of physical activity and the affect it has on the brain and learning to the PE and health teachers in the state. MDE wanted PE teachers to be articulate about what they do and be able to explain to fellow staff, administrators and the community how what they do has a positive effect on how their students learn and is critical to that learning process. A workshop was developed and offered throughout the state. Based on the needs of the school it could be a half or whole day workshop. It consisted of background information about PE in Michigan, the science behind what physical activity does to the brain and how that impacts learning, and numerous activities and resources that teachers could take back and implement right away. Also included, were strategies to address long term planning and working with the school and community to increase opportunities for students to participate in more movement and physical activity.

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Health Impact



Since beginning the specific training to connect PE and physical activity to improving academic achievement, the workshop has been delivered, in either a half day or whole day, 38 times since 2014. The evaluations from these various workshops were consistently very high and have proven they were very successful in providing resources, shifting the thinking with many of the attendees (including administrators), and providing activities teachers could use immediately with their students and other staff. In follow up with several districts, we learned many of the concepts were taken back and immediately incorporated into the school and classes. One district in particular, Saulte Saint Marie, had a champion that took the information and began changing the culture and climate in her school. The Saulte Area Public School District launched the Spark Our System (SOS) PE program. SOS was designed to address several student health challenges that interfere with the District's educational mission.

The SOS program emphasizes three elements of this model: Health Education, PE and Community Involvement. In the 2016-17 school year, several modifications to the SOS program were made, based upon research and best practices; PE curriculum provided year-round, versus nine weeks, based upon research showing that physical activity requires a year-long effort; Before-school physical activity offered daily and PE earlier in the day within first two class periods; Gender-specific PE classes; Female PE teachers for the female PE classes; Strong, reliable community partners. Results from the Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP), which are based upon the percentage of students who scored "Proficient" or above in English Language Arts or Math, showed that SOS students improved by 17% from Grade 5 to Grade 6, which was statistically significant. This gain was significantly higher than the district-wide average of 10%. The teacher at the head of this initiative was also named Teacher of the Year in her district.