



Opposing Substitution and Waiver/Exemptions for Required Physical Education

A Position Paper from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education

It is the position of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) that all K-12 students should take all required physical education courses and that no substitutions, waivers, or exemptions should be permitted.

Physical education is an essential and integral component of a total education. The National Standards for Physical Education define what a student should know and be able to do as a result of a quality physical education program. The unique goals of physical education are the development of physical competence, health-related fitness, cognitive understanding, and a positive attitude toward physical activity so that individuals can adopt and maintain physically active and healthy lifestyles (NASPE, 2004a).

Standard Three of the National Standards for Physical Education states that “a physically educated person participates regularly in physical activity” (NASPE, 2004a, p. 11). This standard connects what is done in physical education class with the lives of students outside of the classroom. The standard addresses the use of skills and knowledge learned in physical education class for participation in physical activities of one’s choosing. National recommendations state that school aged children and youth should participate in at least 60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity (NASPE, 2004b; Strong, et al., 2005; USDHHS & USDA, 2005). Physical education provides a portion of the recommended time, but typically cannot provide all of it. For that reason, as well as for the development of positive lifestyle behaviors, ensuring that students are participating in physical activity outside of physical education class is a primary goal of physical education.

Classes and activities that provide physical activity (e.g., marching band, ROTC, cheerleading, school and community sports) have important but distinctly different goals than physical education. Any opportunity for students to participate in sustained periods of meaningful physical activity can be valuable for their health and fitness, but these activities do not provide the content of a comprehensive, standards-based physical education program and thus should not be allowed to fulfill a physical education requirement.

In cases where the general physical education course cannot meet the needs of a student because of a permanent physical or cognitive disability or religious

reasons, the student should participate in required physical education through adapted physical education classes provided by the school/school district.

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