QUALITY PE PUTS KIDS ON THE INSIDE TRACK TO ACHIEVING A HEALTHY LIFE

Today's physical education can make children smarter, happier and healthier while making our country more competitive



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Who We Are

Champions for America's Future is a national, bipartisan, network of athletes, coaches and sports leaders who have come together to make sure every child has the best chance to compete in life.

Our members rely on the best research and their own experiences to focus on what will give kids an edge in the future.

We educate the public and policymakers at the local, state and national levels about the need to invest in proven, cost-effective programs that help children overcome the obstacles that prevent them from competing successfully in the 21st century.

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Quality PE Puts Kids on the Inside Track to Achieving a Healthy Life

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As sports leaders, we want every child to have the opportunity to succeed in life that we had. Yet as inactivity becomes the norm in the United States, those of us in the sports community are increasingly concerned that more and more kids aren't getting a shot at a healthy future. Moreover, this crisis is taking a toll on our country's future competitiveness, with inactivity already damaging our economy, our national security, and our health care system.

We can counter this culture of inactivity by fostering a culture of health, particularly during childhood—a critical time when healthy behaviors are formed. In fact, children who are active throughout adolescence are 7 to 13 times more likely to become active adults.[1]

While there are many ways to increase kids' physical activity, this report focuses on the importance of physical education in schools. Physical education impacts all children, and mounting evidence shows that high-quality programs can directly impact students' fitness, weight, and even their academic performance. Yet physical education programs are currently absent from many schools, and limited in most others.

For this reason, the sports leaders of Champions for America's Future urge policymakers in Tennessee and across the nation to make quality physical education programs a regular part of children's education. This will not only strengthen our nation, but also help the next generation of Americans compete in life.

> **"Quality physical education builds healthier bodies *and* healthier minds. But, more than that, it teaches children to embrace physical activity at a young age and to remain active throughout their lives. These positive habits are crucial tools for fighting the inactivity epidemic that currently plagues our nation."**
>
> **—Tamika Catchings**
> Three-time Olympic Gold Medalist (Basketball)
> WNBA Champion (Indiana Fever)
> NCAA Champion, Women's Basketball (University of Tennessee)

An Inactivity Epidemic is Hurting Our Country

Many people may not realize it, but the unmistakable sounds of sneakers squeaking on gymnasium floors, jump ropes skimming across the pavement, and kids chatting loudly on the walk home from school are far less prevalent than a few decades ago.



Physical Education in Tennessee Compared to the Nation

More than half of high school students nationwide do not have any PE in an average week.[7] Meanwhile, 96 percent of elementary schools offer less than 2.5 hours of PE per week.[8]

Tennessee has the fourth-highest adult obesity rate in the nation, and an alarming 34 percent of youth in the state are overweight or obese.[9] Yet 60 percent of high school students in Tennessee don't have any physical education in an average week, and Tennessee is one of only eight states that does not require physical education in elementary school.[10]

From our neighborhoods to our schools, we've engineered physical activity out of everyday life. The signs of this shift are everywhere. Children lack adequate access to play spaces and safe routes to school. Nearly one-third of school athletic facilities are outdated or in a state of disrepair. Cars are the dominant form of transportation, even for kids. Sidewalks are often an afterthought in community planning.

These are just some of the many markers of our nation's current inactivity epidemic. In less than two generations, physical activity has dropped by *40 percent* among adults in the US.[2] Now, close to three-quarters of youth report that they don't get the 60 minutes of physical activity a day recommended by experts, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.[3] Some scholars have called the inactivity epidemic "one of the most important public health problems of the 21st century."[4]

The consequences are far-reaching. Research shows that inactivity already accounts for one in 10 premature deaths in the U.S. by increasing the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.[5] Inactivity is also costing the American economy $117 billion each year and contributing to the fact that more than 70 percent of young adults cannot qualify for military service.[6]

Physical Education Helps Kids Learn How to be Active for Life

While there are many strategies to address the lack of physical activity among kids, physical education in school has been proven to impact both kids' physical and mental fitness. In addition, compared to other activities like sports, physical education reaches many more kids.[11]

Studies of physical education programs that emphasize total participation and health and nutrition education have found that they substantially increased children's physical fitness and endurance.[12] Other rigorous studies have found that increasing physical activity during the school day can improve bone growth in prepubescent children.[13]

There is also solid evidence that quality physical education can help promote healthy weights among children. A rigorous study in the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine showed that **adolescents who participated in daily physical education decreased their odds of becoming an overweight adult by 28 percent**.[14]

Physical Education Can Also Help Kids Compete in the Classroom

While that alone is a good reason to support quality physical education, the benefits of these programs aren't limited to physical fitness. Research also shows that physical activity can enhance kids' brain functioning.

Specifically, physical activity increases neural activity in areas of the brain associated with attention and memory.[15] Because of this relationship, one randomized trial found that **incorporating 20 minutes of physical activity into the school day significantly improved test scores in math, reading and spelling**.[16]

Similarly, another randomized trial found that an afterschool program that engaged kids in at least **70 minutes of physical activity each day substantially improved their working memory**, which is important for learning, reasoning and comprehension.[17]

Other research shows that physical activity can help individuals with ADHD and depression. One study found that **20 minutes of physical activity improved focus and attention control on tasks among children with ADHD** compared to a group of children doing the same tasks after sitting.[18] Meanwhile, a randomized study found that adding three-to-four hours of aerobic exercise per week was as effective at treating mild and moderate depression in adults as medication or Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.[19]

Not Your Parents' PE

Compared to physical education 30 years ago, many of today's programs take a fun approach to getting kids of different fitness levels active. According to research on these programs compiled by the American Heart Association and SHAPE America, the best PE programs share common elements:

High-Quality Instruction

The best physical education programs have well-trained instructors and focus on teaching all students, including those with disabilities, to enjoy being active.[20]

Adequate Resources

One survey of PE teachers showed that the median annual funding from the school and district budget for a school's PE program is less than $800.[21] Greater resources can help improve programs: one study found that a school district saw its student obesity rates plummet faster than almost any other location nationwide with an investment in new exercise equipment and facilities among other initiatives.[22]

Low Student-Teacher Ratios

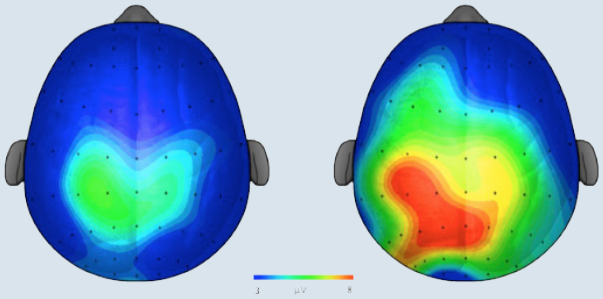
A recent review of 40 studies found that school-based physical activity in smaller classes improved students' academic performance significantly more than those in larger groups.[23]

Adequate Class Time

Experts recommend a total of 150 minutes of PE per week in elementary school and 225 minutes per week at the secondary level.[24]

Physical Activity Boosts Brain Activity

Children's average neural activity while taking a test after 20 minutes of sitting compared to 20 minutes of walking. The color blue indicates lower brain activity, while the color red indicates higher brain activity.



Post 20 min of sitting Post 20 min of walking

Used with permission from Charles Hillman, University of Illinois

Assessment and Accountability

Similar to the way successful sports teams have concrete measures of performance, assessments of physical education programs and student fitness levels will provide schools and districts with apples-to-apples comparisons and encourage sharing of best practices.

The Path Forward

As sports leaders, we want every child to have the opportunity to compete in life. Yet too many kids are losing out because physical activity isn't a part of their daily routine. While most kids will not compete as professional athletes, physical education will help them build healthy lifelong habits.

Policymakers in Tennessee and nationwide have an outstanding opportunity to make quality physical education programs a regular part of children's education. **Nationally, policymakers can highlight and incentivize quality physical education** through funding and by emphasizing the benefits of physical education in a well-rounded education. **In Tennessee, policymakers can require physical education in elementary schools** through the Tom Cronan Physical Education Bill, which would require at least two, 30- to 45-minute periods each week.

As athletes and coaches, we urge them to take these opportunities to strengthen physical education. This will not only help to build a national culture of health, but also help the next generation of Americans compete in life.

Physical Activity Can Improve Academics



Obesity and Physical Activity in Tennessee's Largest Counties

	Overweight or obese students	Adults who are obese	Physically inactive adults
Statewide	39%	32%	30%
Davidson (Nashville)	36	31	26
Hamilton (Chattanooga)	35	29	29
Knox (Knoxville)	33	29	28
Rutherford (Murfreesboro)	38	32	25
Shelby (Memphis)	36	35	28
Williamson (Franklin)	23	27	23

Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings & Roadmaps 2015; Tennessee Department of Education 2012-13

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