

Date of Issue: October 6, 2005**Effective:** Until revoked or
modified**Subject:** DAILY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, GRADES 1–8**Application:** Directors of Education
Supervisory Officers and Secretary-Treasurers of School Authorities
Principals of Elementary Schools

Introduction

The Ontario government is committed to supporting a healthy school environment. Physical activity is essential for the proper growth and development of children and youth. Providing elementary students¹ with opportunities to be physically active can have a positive impact on their physical, mental, and social well-being. In particular, physical activity is likely to have an impact on students' achievement, readiness to learn, behaviour, and self-esteem. Positive experiences with physical activity at a young age also help lay the foundation for healthy, productive lives.

Physical inactivity has become a serious health and social issue for Canadian children and youth. Research indicates that activity levels for the majority of children and youth are not sufficient for healthy growth and development, and that many young people do not have an opportunity to be physically active every day.² In addition, during the past twenty-five years, obesity rates among children have increased substantially, with the result that a large number of children face the risk of developing such serious illnesses as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, stroke, and some cancers.³

In this context, it should also be noted that Ontario's Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Sheela Basrur, has called on "all levels of government, the health sector, the food industries, workplaces, schools, families and individuals to become part of a comprehensive province-wide effort to change all the factors that contribute to unhealthy weight. We must act now to create communities that promote healthy eating and regular physical activity."⁴

1. For the purposes of this memorandum only, *elementary students* refers to students in Grades 1 to 8 in publicly funded schools.

2. *2004 Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health Report: Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives* (Toronto: Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Ontario, 2004), p. 2.

3. *The World Health Report, 2002: Reducing Risks, Promoting Healthy Life* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization, 2002), p. 61.

4. *2004 Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health Report*, p. 3.

The Requirement

The Ministry of Education supports and promotes the participation of students in daily physical activity. Consequently, school boards⁵ must ensure that all elementary students, including students with special needs, have a minimum of twenty minutes of sustained moderate to vigorous physical activity each school day during instructional time. The goal of daily physical activity is to enable all elementary students to improve or maintain their physical fitness and their overall health and wellness, and to enhance their learning opportunities.

Daily physical activity may include walking, active games, dance, aquatics, sports, and fitness and recreational activities (where facilities permit).

Implementation

Daily physical activity may be incorporated into the instructional day in a variety of ways. For instance, twenty minutes or more of physical activity during a scheduled health and physical education class would meet the daily physical activity requirement. Since physical activity is only one component of a complete health and physical education program, there will be days when a health and physical education class does not include physical activity. On these days and on days when no health and physical education class is scheduled, other opportunities for at least twenty minutes of physical activity during the instructional day will need to be provided. Integrating physical activity into other curriculum areas is one appropriate strategy.

All activities must be adapted, as appropriate, to ensure that students with special needs can participate in them. Such adaptations must be consistent with the accommodations and/or modifications that are typically found in a student's Individual Education Plan.

Since individual classes may be at different stages of implementation, daily physical activity may initially occur in several short sessions (a minimum of ten minutes each) over the course of the school day. Elementary school principals will make their best effort to ensure that students are receiving at least twenty minutes of sustained moderate to vigorous daily physical activity during instructional time as soon as possible, and will meet this objective by the end of the 2005-06 school year.

Safety

Providing physical and social environments that encourage and enable students to engage in safe and enjoyable physical activities will continue to be important. As indicated in *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8: Health and Physical Education, 1998*, procedures must be developed to ensure the highest level of safety, while allowing students to engage in a broad range of activities.

5. In this document, *school board(s)* and *board(s)* refer to district school boards and school authorities.

Reporting and Accountability

School boards will monitor the implementation of the policy on daily physical activity to ensure that all elementary students are provided with the opportunity to be active for at least twenty minutes each day during instructional time. School boards and principals should also take appropriate action to ensure that parents are kept informed of their children's participation in activities.