Amount of Required Physical Education: Pennsylvania mandates physical education in grades K-6, but it does not require daily recess. The state also mandates that middle school/junior high schools and high schools provide physical education to students. Planned instruction is mandated for every student every year in the primary (generally K-3) and intermediate (generally 4-6 but dependent on the district configuration) levels. Planned instruction must be provided to every student in the middle school program. It is not mandated every year. The local school district determines the grade level. Planned instruction must be provided to every student in the senior high school program. It is not mandated every year. The local school district determines the grade level and the number of minutes per week. These are local control issues.

High School Graduation Requirements: The state focuses on the standards rather than physical education credits for graduation. The state requires course completion and grades and the results of local assessments aligned to the academic standards.

Substitutions: The state does not permit school districts or schools to allow students to substitute other activities for their required physical education credit.

Exemptions/Waivers: Exemptions are not allowed.

State Standards: The state has developed its own standards for physical education, with which all school districts must comply. The Academic Standards for Health, Safety and Physical Education were last revised in 2003. [See State Standards for Physical Education chart for details.]

State Curriculum: The state does not require the use of specific curricula for elementary, middle school/junior high and high school physical education. This is a local control issue. Local school districts have the option of using any curriculum, as long as the program aligns with the Pennsylvania state standards.

Class Size: The state does not mandate a teacher-to-student ratio.
Online Physical Education Courses: The state allows online courses for physical education credits but only Cyber Charter School students are eligible to take online courses. Currently, a course in comprehensive physical education (addressing all state or national standards) is offered online, and must be taught by a state-certified physical education teacher.

Student Assessment Requirements: Schools must have an assessment system in place to monitor progress on the standards. Results are used by school districts to determine progress on the Health, Safety and Physical Education Standards. The standard benchmarks are grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 but may be assessed earlier. Formative assessment is expected to be ongoing within the physical education class.

Fitness Testing: The state does not require the use of a particular fitness test protocol.

State Comprehensive Assessment Test: The state does not have a comprehensive assessment test for graduation.

Education Report Card: The state does not have an education report card for each school.

Body Mass Index (BMI): The state requires schools to collect students’ BMI or height and weight once per year in grades 1-12. Results are sent to the state as aggregate data for the school. Individual student results are sent to the parents or guardians with an explanation of the BMI, the BMI score, BMI classification and, if necessary, recommendations to further discuss the results with a family physician.

Certification/Licensure of Physical Education Teachers: The state requires certification or licensure of physical education teachers at the elementary, middle school/junior high and high school levels. Elementary classroom teachers (generalists) may teach required elementary school physical education classes within a self-contained classroom.

Professional Development of Physical Education Teachers: Professional development continuing education hours or credits are required in order to maintain one’s health and physical education teacher certification. Teachers must obtain 180 hours of professional development over a five-year period. The state requires that professional development be provided in the area of assignment. Physical education teachers must be provided professional development on physical education topics, comparable to other curricular areas. A certification can become inactive if professional development requirements are not met. Upon completion of the professional development requirements the certification is reactivated. State funding is provided to the schools for professional development.

National Board Certification (NBC): The state actively encourages all teachers to become certified through the NBC process. Physical education, however, is not one of the priority disciplines.

District Physical Education Coordinator: The state does not require each school district to have a licensed physical educator serving as a PE coordinator.
Contact Person:
Shirley A. Black
Health & Physical Education Advisor
PA Department of Education
333 Market St., 8th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126
717-772-0067
sblack@state.pa.us