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Marking Our Flags: Introducing the New 2024 National Physical Education Standards

CLANCY SEYMOUR  AND LANGSTON CLARK 

SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators is the premier national professional association for K–12 health and physical education in the United States (Seymour, 2020). This organization is a leader in advocating for quality health and physical education (HPE) programs in the country. As part of this responsibility, SHAPE America develops goals and expectations for HPE professions that include regular reviews, best practice

recommendations, policy statements, and professional development. For over a century, the organization has defined excellence in school-based health and physical education, and its National Standards for K–12 Physical Education have served as the foundation for well-designed physical education programs across the country for decades. After over 10 years in circulation, the time had come to update the latest iteration of the National Physical Education Standards. As

proud members of the National Standards Physical Education Task Force ourselves, our purpose in writing this article is to outline the changes and highlight new features that resulted from this endeavor. Before doing so, a historical context of the development of standards within our profession and society, more broadly, may provide clarity on the need for this project.

The word *standard*, likely of German origin, has two parts: *stan-*tan, to stand, and *ort*, a point or corner (Garrison, 2009). The term etymologically refers to a flag, or a flag to mark a rallying place (Garrison, 2009). Standards also imply an established authority with an unavoidable deference to measurement, judgment, or comparison (Garrison, 2009). Currently, educational standards reflect the aims and values of a particular construct (in this case, K–12 PE; Garrison, 2009). Therefore, questions regarding authority and power when developing standards must always be considered and encouraged.

Current trends in public education mirror these dynamics. Continued changes in technology, along with a recent global pandemic, have changed society and public education in many ways (Carter & Walters, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated social inequities, while also revealing the value of physical and mental health for all citizens (Marconcin et al., 2022; Parenteau et al., 2023). In view of these events, SHAPE America convened a National Standards Physical Education Task Force to revise the standards. A major goal of this venture was to evaluate all aspects of the standards through a culturally responsive lens. Although K–12 PE programs have continued to make progress, it is imperative that movement experiences are inclusive and meaningful for all students (Culp, 2021), which aligns with SHAPE America’s vision of a nation where *all* children are prepared to lead healthy, physically active lives.

Therefore, it was critical to assemble a representative task force that could speak for the diverse and dynamic PE programs across the country. The diversity of the task force was not limited to gender, race, ethnicity, age, or sexual orientation, it also included a range of disciplinary experts, including award-winning K–12 physical educators, adapted physical educators, teacher educators, researchers, and district- and state-level administrators (see Table 1). The process enabled the development of new PE standards that are achievable and attainable for all K–12 students in the United States.

The project was undertaken over the course of two and a half years and included countless hours with several rounds of revision, including virtual and face-to-face meetings. Input from SHAPE America members, as well as K–12 students and the public at large, was also crucial in developing a new set of relevant PE standards. Therefore, multiple phases of public review, including virtual town hall meetings and two national conferences with intentional feedback sessions, were a part of the process. Data from these phases were analyzed and helped to curate the final version of the 2024 National Physical Education Standards, allowing SHAPE America to “mark their flags” at the March 2024 National Convention and Exposition in Cleveland, Ohio.

The current version of the National Physical Education Standards is derivative of the three previous SHAPE America (formerly AAHPERD) iterations developed in 1995, 2004, and 2013. The new 2024 Standards would not have been possible without the vision

and contribution of our outstanding predecessors, highlighted in Table 1.

Introducing the New National Physical Education Standards

Now that we have provided some historical context, we will provide an overview of the 2024 SHAPE America National Physical Education Standards. Included with each standard is a rationale that provides K–12 practitioners further clarity on the recent changes, while continuing to illustrate SHAPE America’s focus on movement learning experiences and a more holistic approach to PE. Please note that the numbered standards with rationales (see Table 2) are not organized hierarchically. Instead, PE practitioners should develop curricula that align with the standards in a way that meets the needs of their students and local school communities.

As mentioned previously, prioritizing the needs of K–12 students as our primary stakeholders was central to the development of the current standards. Most notable, the new standards have been reduced from five to four, including a merger of prior standards two and three. This change occurred because, rather than one standard emphasizing fitness, the new standards have a more encompassing view toward fitness embedded throughout. This new layout is organized by psychomotor, cognitive, affective, and the more recently recognized social learning domain (Standard 3)—a holistic approach to PE where standards are grounded in the philosophy that meaningful learning experiences should always occur within a movement context (SHAPE America, 2024).

The standards also highlight the importance of considering students’ perspectives for the success of PE programs (Beni et al., 2019; El-Sherif, 2014). This ensures that teaching and curriculum design developed from the standards are tailored to students’ needs and aspirations, making them more student focused and relevant. For example, in the social learning standard (Standard 3), students reflect on their PE experiences. Indicators for this standard express an expectation that students will have the choice and autonomy to explore a variety of physical activities. Because students are at various stages in their physical literacy journey, the learning progressions are designed to support their development based on their current abilities, helping them achieve progress and grow.

Despite the changes mentioned, several aspects of the new standards continue from previous versions. For example, PE’s commitment to supporting the physical literacy initiative and the importance and encompassing view of fitness remain the same. An inclusive PE experience is also prioritized, where applicable grade-level progressions help the instructor pinpoint areas for learning and do not infringe on PE teachers’ autonomy to meet their students’ needs. Likewise, the choice of language in PE standards reflects a broader commitment to inclusivity, helping to ensure that students with disabilities are not excluded or overlooked. These standards embody a value system that acknowledges the importance of physical literacy for all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities (SHAPE America, 2024).

The Physical Literacy Journey

The standards’ perspective on the physical literacy construct has also evolved, now framing physical literacy as an ongoing lifelong journey — a continuum without a fixed endpoint (see Figure 1). As such, the standards frame physical literacy as a dynamic process recognizing that students are on individual developmental journeys

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Table 1.
National Standard Task Force Members

1995	2004	2013	2024
Judith Rink, University of South Carolina	Deborah Tannehill, Pacific Lutheran University	Lynn Couturier, State University of New York College at Cortland	Brad Brummel, Springfield Public Schools
Charles Dotson, University of Maryland	Glenna DeJong, Michigan Fitness Foundation	Stevie Chepko, Winthrop University	Sally Jones, PE/APE Consultant
Marian Franck, Lancaster, Pennsylvania	Larry Hensley, University of Northern Iowa	Shirley Holt/Hale, Linden Elementary School	Amanda Amtmanis, Middletown Public Schools
Larry Hensley, University of Northern Iowa	Charlene Burgeson, Executive Director, NASPE (staff)	Dan Persse, Blaine Elementary School	Langston Clark, University of Texas at San Antonio
Shirley Holt-Hale, Oak Ridge, Tennessee		Brad Rettig, Lincoln High School	Fran Cleland, Westchester University, retired
Jacalyn Lund, University of Louisville		Georgi Roberts, Fort Worth Independent School District	Kelly Cornett, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
Greg Payne, San Jose State University		E. Paul Roetart, CEO, SHAPE America (staff)	Dan DeJager, San Juan Unified School District
Terry Wood, Oregon State University		Cheryl Richardson, Senior Director of Programs, SHAPE America (staff)	Suzanna Dillon, Texas Woman's University
Judith C. Young, Executive Director, NASPE (staff)			Cory Dixon, Rowan University
			Jonathan Jones, Prince George's County Public Schools
			Paulo Ribeiro, Parkway School District
			Clancy Seymour, Canisius University
			Michelle Carter, Director of Educational Content & Programs, SHAPE America (staff)

carrying what they learn in K–12 PE throughout their lives. “The physical literacy journey involves the ongoing acquisition and application of knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for

engagement in a lifetime of healthful and meaningful physical activity” (Carter et al., 2024).



Grade-Span Learning Indicators and Learning Progressions

The current version of the National PE Standards also includes a shift from grade-level outcomes to grade-span learning indicators with learning progressions. This approach is more inclusive while emphasizing meaningful movement and learning experiences for all children in PE. It further supports a childhood developmental perspective that recognizes that human growth in many capacities (e.g., physical, mental, social, personal, and emotional) is age related and *not* age dependent (Goodway et al., 2021). For example, when exploring the movement skills of children in PE, “development is not dependent on one’s age but on opportunities for practice, instruction, and encouragement. Thus, it would not be expected to have all children in a second-grade class at the same stage of motor skill development” (SHAPE America, 2024, pp. 4–5).

Table 2.
The 2024 SHAPE America National Physical Education Standards

Standard 1	Develops a variety of motor skills	Rationale: Through learning experiences in physical education, the student develops motor skills across a variety of environments. Motor skills are a foundational part of child development and support the movements of everyday life. The development of motor skills contributes to an individual's physical literacy journey.
Standard 2	Applies knowledge related to movement and fitness concepts	Rationale: Through learning experiences in physical education, the student uses their knowledge of movement concepts, tactics, and strategies across a variety of environments. This knowledge helps the student become a more versatile and efficient mover. Additionally, the student applies knowledge of health-related and skill-related fitness to enhance their overall well-being. The application of knowledge related to various forms of movement contributes to an individual's physical literacy journey.
Standard 3	Develops social skills through movement	Rationale: Through learning experiences in physical education, students develop the social skills necessary to exhibit empathy and respect for others and foster and maintain relationships. In addition, students develop skills for communication, leadership, cultural awareness, and conflict resolution in a variety of physical activity settings.
Standard 4	Develops personal skills, identifies personal benefits of movement, and chooses to engage in physical activity	Rationale: Through learning experiences in physical education, the student develops an understanding of how movement is personally beneficial and subsequently chooses to participate in physical activities that are personally meaningful (e.g., activities that offer social interaction, cultural connection, exploration, choice, self-expression, appropriate levels of challenge, and added health benefits). The student develops personal skills including goal setting, identifying strengths, and reflection to enhance their physical literacy journey.

Note: Although numbered, the standards are not in a hierarchical order of importance.

The Physical Literacy Journey



Figure 1. The Physical Literacy Journey

Table 3.
Sample Standards 1 and 3 Grade-Span Learning Indicators and Learning Progressions

Standard 1: Develops a variety of motor skills			
Learning indicator	Invasion: (1.5.17) Demonstrates sending and receiving an object in a variety of practice tasks		
Learning progression	Sends object in varied pathways from a stationary position to a stationary partner	Moves the object in a 3 v 1 practice task in a grid-like space	Maintains possession of object while moving around cold or warm defenders and using jab step to avoid defender
Standard 3: Develops social skills through movement			
Learning indicator	(3.5.3) Demonstrates respectful behaviors that contribute to positive social interaction in group activities		
Learning progression	Praises the movement performance of others, both more and less skilled	Recognizes the role of respectful interactions with others when participating in physical activity	Demonstrates teamwork with partner(s), small group, and whole group

As a result, grade-span learning indicators have been crafted to articulate the content areas in a manner that is both observable and measurable. Subsequent learning progressions are meant to guide teachers as they unpack grade-span learning indicators. The learning progressions are examples for educators to develop their own more easily. Also provided in the learning progressions are sample sequential tasks that address a range of skill abilities from pre-kindergarten through high school.

How to Use the Standards

Always the case, the National Physical Education Standards were envisioned for K–12 students to demonstrate what they know and are able to do in PE using current best practices and research to support local school district and community needs (SHAPE America, n.d.). The new standards were crafted broadly to provide flexibility for both physical educators and K–12 students. Analogous to the building codes used by architects, engineers, and contractors, the standards must always be addressed but are not the purpose of the design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2012). Therefore, physical educators must consider the standards in their practice but have the autonomy to interpret and apply them distinctly in their own settings. The standards are not PE curricula but they enable practitioners to develop meaningful and relevant content (curriculum) that aligns with the profession’s established aims (standards).

At the same time, teaching K–12 PE in the United States is unique for a variety of reasons. There are significant differences among school districts related to facilities, equipment, time allotment, class size, and much more. Therefore, the new National Physical Education Standards are designed to meet the needs of all constituents, including diverse students, PE teachers, PE programs, and local school communities.

The example in Table 3 illustrates how a physical educator can be intentional with developing curricular movement experiences that infuse the standards with learning indicators and grade-span learning progressions. The instructor teaching intermediate (Grades 3–5) students manipulative/striking skills and lead-up tasks for invasion games like soccer (Standard 1) may choose to focus on sending and receiving skills in class (1.5.17). The physical educator may also want to address social skills (Standard 3) in the same lesson. During PE class, the instructor can review learning objectives and skills related to ball manipulation/striking with feet (Standard 1), while

also stressing the importance of positive feedback and praise in a social setting (Standard 3). Throughout the lesson, students are provided opportunities to practice both sets of skills (manipulation/striking and feedback/praise). The culminating task of the lesson could be a lead-up game that reinforces psychomotor skills while the PE teacher or fellow students (peer assessment) chart positive feedback/praise demonstrated by their classmates.

Conclusion

Overall, the 2024 SHAPE America National Physical Education Standards are grounded in a holistic approach to PE. This supports and enables practitioners to nurture meaningful and relevant learning experiences for all children. It is with great optimism that we encourage researchers, teacher educators, and practitioners to leverage these new standards in designing and implementing developmentally appropriate curricula. Such curricula should comprehensively address students’ needs and effectively prepare them for their lifelong physical literacy journey. The new standards promote inclusive PE and the premise that “physical education is for all students.” Furthermore, the new standards encourage practitioners to explore learning experiences in, about, and through movement proposed by scholars historically (Arnold, 1979; Brown & Penney, 2013; Lambert, 2020) while remaining steadfast to the mantra that *we are physical education — say it loud and say it proud*.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.


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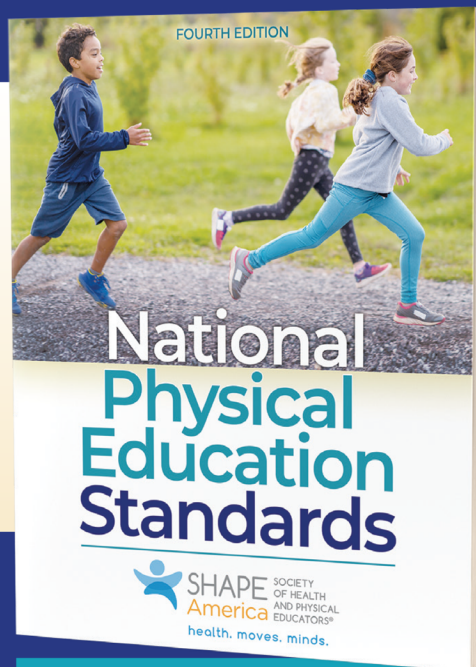
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