Executive Summary

Introduction

For nearly 20 years the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) has been conducting the *Shape of the Nation Report* every few years to summarize information for the profession and the public regarding the status of physical education in the American educational system. The preeminent national authority on physical education and a recognized leader in sport and physical activity, NASPE is partnering on the 2006 *Shape of the Nation Report* with the American Heart Association (AHA), a national voluntary health agency whose mission is to reduce disability and death from cardiovascular diseases and stroke. This joint project is important to both organizations because, in a time of increasing health risks and health care costs in our country, prevention is key and exemplary physical education programs must be part of the solution for inactivity, obesity, and related chronic diseases.

The challenge of the first *Shape of the Nation Report* in 1987 continues in this latest survey. That is, typically state mandates are broad and general, leaving many specifics open to interpretation.

Several facts should be considered when reviewing the results of the 2006 survey:
- There is no federal law that requires physical education to be provided to students in the American education system, nor any incentives for offering physical education programs.
- States may set some general or minimum requirements, but individual school districts provide specific direction and may exceed the minimum recommendations.
- Many states delegate responsibility for educational decisions to the local school districts.

The importance of physical education in the health of young people has been a part of the health objectives for the nation since 1990. *Healthy People 2010* includes three objectives related to school physical education:

- **22-8** Increase the proportion of the nation’s public and private schools that require daily physical education for all students.
- **22-9** Increase the proportion of adolescents who participate in daily school physical education.
- **22-10** Increase the proportion of adolescents who spend at least 50 percent of school physical education class time being physically active.

Purpose

The purpose of this *Shape of the Nation Report* is to provide current information about the status of physical education in each state and the District of Columbia in the following areas:
- Time requirements
- Exemptions/waivers and substitutions
- Class size
- Standards, curriculum, and instruction
- Student assessment and program accountability
- Physical education teacher certification/licensure
- National Board Certification in physical education
- State Physical Education Coordinator
- Body Mass Index (BMI) collection

This report will not only bring attention to the importance of quality, daily physical education programs for all school age children; it will also provide information that can be used as a basis for expanding and improving physical education programs in those states that need assistance. Quality physical education programs for all of our children are the foundation for healthy, physically active lifestyles as adults. The vision is that every student will become physically educated and thus possess the knowledge, skills, and confidence to be physically active and healthy for a lifetime.
**Methodology**

During the winter of 2006, NASPE requested that physical education coordinators in all 50 state education agencies and the District of Columbia complete an online questionnaire about physical education mandates and practices in their state. Follow-up email messages and phone calls achieved complete response by all 51 entities. The data was reviewed and compiled into individual state profiles and summary charts. The profile for each state was returned to the respective state education agency representatives for confirmation of the content and revisions as needed.

**Results**

Twenty years after the U.S. Congress passed House Concurrent Resolution 97 encouraging state and local governments and local education agencies to provide high-quality daily physical education programs for all children in kindergarten through grade 12; 15 years after Goals 2000 called for inclusion of physical education as an integral component of all school programs; and five years after The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity put forth quality daily K-12 physical education for all children as a key action, inadequate progress has been made. In fact, another federal initiative, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, is threatening the amount of time available for physical education. No Child Left Behind focuses on student achievement in defined core academic subjects. As states conduct standardized tests to hold schools and students accountable, content that is not tested, such as physical education, has become a lower priority.

Since the last Shape of the Nation Report in 2001 there has been a continued increase in childhood and adult overweight and obesity. Currently 16 percent (over 9 million) of children and teens age 6 to 19 years are overweight and an additional 31 percent are at risk for overweight. Yet most states are not living up to the recommendations of multiple reports and “calls to action” from the federal government and other national organizations regarding physical education including Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General (1996), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Guidelines for Schools and Community Programs to Promote Lifelong Physical Activity Among Young People (1997), Healthy People 2010 (2000), The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity (2001), Institute of Medicine report on Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance (2005), The Future of Children report, Childhood Obesity (2006), and position statements/publications from the American Academy of Pediatrics, Action for Healthy Kids, and National Association of State Boards of Education.

Even though a majority of states mandate physical education, most do not require a specific amount of instructional time and about half allow exemptions, waivers, and/or substitutions. These “loopholes” significantly reduce the effectiveness of the mandate.

Another general pattern with differential impact on physical education is local control of education. Some states establish standards or very broad guidelines for curriculum content and defer specific decisions regarding time, class size, and student assessment to local school districts or even schools. This results in very diverse patterns of delivery for physical education within states.

**Survey highlights**

**Time Requirements**

The majority of states mandate that students must take physical education. Over seventy percent of states (36) mandate physical education for elementary school students, 65 percent of states (33) mandate it for middle/junior high school students, and 83 percent of states (42) mandate it for high school students. Of those who mandate physical education for elementary school students, all (100%) require physical education in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, while 94 percent require physical education in 6th grade. Of those who mandate physical education for middle/junior high school students, 91 percent require it in 7th grade, and 85 percent require it in 8th grade. Among those who mandate physical education for high school students, 76 percent do not mandate the specific grade(s) during which physical education must be taken. For the 24 percent that do mandate the specific grade(s), 100 percent require physical education in 9th grade, 90 percent require it in 10th grade, 70 percent require it in 11th grade, and 60 percent require it in 12th grade.

Sixty-nine percent (35) of all states mandate the number of high school physical education credits that are required for a student to graduate. Of those 35 states, 14 require one credit, eight require one-half credit, six require one-and-a-half credits, six require two credits, and one (New Jersey) requires 3.75 credits.

The majority of states do not mandate a certain number of minutes per week for physical education. Only 22 percent of states (11) mandate minutes per week for elementary schools, 14 percent of states (7) for middle/jun-
ior high schools, and 20 percent of states (10) for high schools. Among those 11 states that mandate minutes per week for elementary schools, only two states (Louisiana, New Jersey) meet the national recommendation of 150 or more minutes per week (commonly “daily physical education”). Six states (including the two that require 150 or more minutes) require at least 90 minutes per week (commonly three days/week), and only one state mandates less than 30 minutes per week (commonly one day/week). Among those seven states that mandate minutes per week for middle/junior high schools, only one state (Montana) meets the national recommendation of 225 or more minutes per week. Four states (including the one that requires 225 or more minutes) provide at least 135 minutes per week, and only one state mandates less than 45 minutes per week. Among those 10 states that mandate minutes per week for high schools, three states (Indiana, Montana, South Carolina) and the District of Columbia meet that national recommendation of 225 or more minutes per week. Eight states (including the four that require 225 or more minutes) provide at least 135 minutes per week, and only one state mandates less than 45 minutes per week.

**Exemptions/Waivers and Substitutions**
Just over one-third of states (18) grant exemptions/waivers for school districts regarding physical education time or credit requirements. More than half of states (27) permit school districts or schools to allow students to substitute other activities for their required physical education credit. Among those states, the most common allowances are for ROTC (18), interscholastic sports (17), and marching band (11).

Two states in the country—Illinois and Massachusetts—require physical education in every grade K-12. New Jersey and Rhode Island require physical education in grades 1-12. However, Illinois grants exemptions/waivers for school districts regarding physical education time or credit requirements. Additionally, Illinois, Massachusetts, and New Jersey permit school districts or schools to allow students to substitute other activities for their required physical education credit.

**Standards and Assessment**

Forty-seven states and the District of Columbia have their own state standards for physical education. The majority of those states address the six national standards for physical education within their state standards: 47 states address motor/movement skills and physical fitness, 46 states address knowledge and personal/social responsibility, and 45 states address regular participation in physical activity and 44 states address the value of physical activity.

Only 29 percent of states (15) require student assessment in physical education. Among the states that do require assessment, 73 percent (11) require assessment of physical fitness, 67 percent (10) require assessment of knowledge, 60 percent (9) require assessment of motor/movement skills, 20 percent (3) require assessment of participation in physical activity outside of physical education class, and 13 percent (2) require assessment of personal/social interactions in physical education.

**Online Physical Education**
Almost one-fourth of states (24% or 12) allow required physical education credits to be earned through online physical education courses. Those states are: Alaska, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oregon, South Carolina, Utah, and Virginia. Of those 12 states, six offer online comprehensive physical education (defined as addressing all state or national physical education standards), and five offer an online personal fitness/wellness course. Only two states offer online sport courses and online weight training courses.

Among the 12 states that offer online required physical education courses, six states allow all students to take the courses, and three states allow students who request permission and are approved. In only seven of the 12 states are all online courses taught only by state certified physical education teachers.

**Accountability**
Forty-three percent of states (22) require physical education grades to be included in a student’s grade point average (GPA). Sixteen states have a required comprehensive assessment test for graduation, but none include physical education achievement. The majority of states (89% or 45) have an educational report card; in 36 of those 45 states, the report card rates specific subject areas individually, but only three of those states (California, Hawaii, Kentucky) include physical education on their state report card.

**Teacher Certification/Licensure**
All 50 states and the District of Columbia have a process for certification/licensure of physical education teachers. The majority of states require that all who teach physical
education at the middle/junior high and high school levels are certified/licensed by the state in physical education (84% or 43 states for middle/junior high; 90 percent or 46 states for high school). However, only 57 percent of states (28) require this at the elementary school level. Most states (84% or 43 states) have a requirement for professional development/continuing education hours/credits for a physical education teacher to maintain/renew his/her certification. The most common length of certification is five years (66% or 29 states).

Thirty-five states (69%) grant temporary/emergency certificates to teach middle/junior high school and high school physical education; thirty-one states (61%) do so for elementary school physical education. Of the 29 states that have a minimum requirement for receiving a temporary/emergency certificate, 13 require a bachelors degree in teaching (but not in physical education), and nine require a bachelors degree in any area. In 21 states, the temporary/emergency certificate is valid for one year. In 15 states, a temporary/emergency certificate can be renewed.

Almost two-thirds of states (33) allow elementary, middle/junior high school, and high school physical education teachers to be hired using alternative certification. For this survey, alternative certification was defined as a process for allowing teachers to become certified in an area other than their major. For example if an elementary education teacher wants to become certified in physical education, he/she can take the state certification test, and if passed, become certified in physical education. Other professionals outside the area of education may take the certification test to become certified to teach physical education.

Fifty-nine percent of states (30) actively support physical education teachers going through the National Board Certification (NBC) process. Twenty-nine of those states actively promote NBC and encourage teachers to register, and 18 states provide mentoring for teachers going through the process. State support in regard to funding all or part of the cost of the NBC process is: two states provide full funding for the process regardless of whether the teacher receives certification, six states provide full funding if the teacher receives certification, seven states provide partial funding regardless of whether the teacher receives certification, and 11 states provide partial funding if the teacher receives certification. Fourteen states provide NBC teachers with a higher ongoing level of pay while 12 states provide a one-time monetary bonus to new NBC teachers.

**Body Mass Index (BMI) Collection**

Currently only three states—Arkansas, California and Illinois—require schools to measure body mass index (BMI) for each student. All three states collect the data in 5th and 9th grades. Arkansas collects data at all grade levels. California also collects the data in 7th grade, and Illinois collects it in 1st grade.

Two states require that aggregate BMI data is sent to them from each school district and school. Two states require that individual student results are sent to the students’ parents, and two states report using the data in a research study.

**Recommendations for Action**

NASPE and AHA want to remind America that “Physically active, healthy kids learn better!” School-age youths need at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.

To achieve that level of activity, NASPE and AHA recommend that schools across the country make physical education instruction the cornerstone of a comprehensive school physical activity program that also includes health education, elementary school recess, after-school physical activity clubs and intramurals, high school interscholastic athletics, walk/bike to school programs, and staff wellness programs. It is particularly important that voluntary programs (i.e., after school physical activity clubs, intramurals) are designed to attract all students, especially those not interested in traditional athletic programs.

Physical education is a planned instructional program with specific objectives. An essential part of the total curriculum, physical education programs increase the physical competence, health-related fitness, self-responsibility, and enjoyment of physical activity for all students so that they can establish physical activity as a natural part of everyday life.

For elementary school students, recess provides an opportunity for needed physical activity. Children learn how to make decisions, cooperate, compete constructively, assume leader/follower roles, and resolve conflicts by interacting in play. Play is an essential element of children’s physical and social development.

NASPE and AHA recommend that schools and communities work together to offer a variety of physical activities as part of before- and after-school child care and recreation programs. Child care providers, recreation staff, and coaches need training to provide developmentally appropriate, safe, and enjoyable activities.
Parents need to be proactive and effective advocates for quality physical education and school physical activity programs, and communities need to develop and promote the use of safe, well-maintained and close-to-home sidewalks, bike paths, trails, and facilities for physical activity and sport participation. Most of all, parents and other adult role models need to set a good example by being active themselves.

In summary, NASPE and AHA recommend the following:
1. Quality physical education is provided to all students as an integral part of K-12 education.
2. Physical education is delivered by certified/licensed physical education teachers.
3. Adequate time (i.e., 150 minutes per week for elementary school students; 225 minutes per week for middle and high school students) is provided for physical education at every grade, K-12.
4. All states develop standards for student learning in physical education that reflect the National Standards.
5. All states set minimum standards for student achievement in physical education.
6. Successfully meeting minimum standards in physical education is a requirement for high school graduation.
7. Other courses and activities that include physical activity should not be substituted for instructional physical education.
8. Physical activity is incorporated into the school day, in addition to physical education, through elementary school recess, physical activity breaks, physical activity clubs, special events, etc.
9. Parents monitor and support their child’s physical education progress and regular participation in physical activity.
10. Communities provide and promote the use of safe, well-maintained and close-to-home sidewalks, bike paths, trails, and recreation facilities.