



Physical Education and Colorado

An executive summary of the state of PE across Colorado's public school system

DECEMBER 2016



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The health and overall well-being of students across Colorado is a fundamental concern for communities and schools. What opportunities for quality physical education and activity are available to students during the school-day across grade-levels and between demographic groups is not easily known, however. This report is a comprehensive attempt to determine the “State of PE in Colorado”. Looking forward, the PE for All Colorado Coalition has outlined concrete steps to improve the quality of PE programs offered to Colorado students. Our students, schools, and communities benefit when health is a priority. Improving PE is not easy – as this report makes clear – but there are creative solutions that school districts can, and do, employ. We highlight four schools that are making PE a top priority and providing high quality programs to their students.

To fully address the current state of PE in Colorado, this report centers on two primary questions:

- 1 What are the current PE programs in school districts across Colorado and where do inequities exist?
- 2 What are the barriers to improving quality PE and addressing these inequities?

To first give context to these questions, the report articulates the status of children’s health across the state, most notably the troubling trend in increased childhood obesity.

A look at national, accredited research also provides clarity on the role of PE and regular physical activity in relation to the academic achievement objectives of schools.

Additionally, the report establishes the bar for what quality PE programs look like.



More than

1 in 4 children

in Colorado were overweight or obese in 2013.⁷



95% of parents

believe that physical activity improves the academic performance of kids.¹²



Nationally,

44% of schools

reported making significant cuts to PE and PA since the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The key findings of this report include:

- PE programs in Colorado vary widely. Whether that is a result of different policies, classroom schedules and school calendars, physical space limitations, or teacher shortages, PE is not the same in any two places. It is challenging to assess the quality of PE in the state as a result.
- There are limited tools to determine the nature of each PE program and how they differ from each other. The only data regularly collected by the State of Colorado is a series of questions on student health and wellness embedded in the school performance reporting.
- From anecdotal evidence and conversations with school district leadership across the state, children are not receiving adequate time in PE class or moving enough throughout the day.
- The most significant barrier to implementing and maintaining quality PE programs in Colorado are constitutional fiscal limitations leading to limited financial resources within district budgets.
- On one end, school districts do not have enough funds. On the other end, they have increased pressure to improve academic achievement, which has squeezed out other priorities, including PE programs.

With a starting point established, concerted efforts should be made within every school district in Colorado to improve the quality of PE programs offered to students. The PE for All Colorado Coalition has created a set of recommendations to achieve this goal. Put succinctly, Colorado should adopt robust standards for health and PE. The most effective way for schools to meet those standards is to provide regular, structured PE classes, taught by skilled professionals, to all students, including those with disabilities.

Key recommendations include:

- 1 Students should receive dedicated minutes of quality physical education daily throughout their K-12 education.
- 2 Physical education should be taught by a licensed instructor and employ standards-based curriculum.
- 3 Physical education should not be replaced by physical activity and schools should not substitute athletic participation for physical education or use withholding participation in physical education as a form of punishment.
- 4 Physical education is equitable for all students within each school, the school district and across the entire state of Colorado.
- 5 Districts and the state of Colorado provide adequate funding for providing equitable, quality physical education as well as policy support for physical education in schools.

The PE for All Colorado Coalition is dedicated to working towards a better future for Colorado's students that makes health and well-being a priority that is adequately funded. Understanding the differences and nuances among school districts, we are committed to working in collaboration with each district to find creative ways to tackle the challenges that are standing in the way of improved PE for Colorado's children.