

# **PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

## **Are Schools Providing What the Public Wants?**

***A Survey Conducted by Opinion Research Corporation International of Princeton, NJ,***

***for the National Association for Sport and Physical Education***

### **Introduction**

Current research findings and recommendations, including the *U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity*, *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Guidelines for School and Community Programs*, and *Healthy People 2010 Goals*, indicate consensus on the importance of regular, quality physical education and daily physical activity programs for all students, kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. However, most school districts across the nation are not living up to these recommendations. The numbers are troubling: only about 25 percent of students attend physical education class daily<sup>1</sup>, partake in any daily physical activity<sup>2</sup>, and the percentage of children who are overweight or obese has more than doubled in the last 30 years<sup>3</sup>.

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), a nonprofit membership organization of over 25,000 professionals in the fitness and physical activity fields, is the only national association dedicated to strengthening basic knowledge about sport and physical education among professionals and the general public. Putting that knowledge into action in schools and communities across the nation is critical to improved academic performance, social reform and the health of individuals. NASPE is an association of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD).

### **Purpose of the Survey**

NASPE wanted to go directly to adults and teens to better understand their beliefs about physical education, physical activity and nutrition. We also wanted to find out if schools are providing what adults and students want in physical education programs.

## **Major Findings**

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### **Attitudes toward Physical Education**

Adults and teens have similar attitudes toward physical education.

- “ 81% of adults believe that “daily physical education should be mandatory in schools.” Nearly three-quarters (71%) of teens agree.
  
- “ The majority of adults and teens strongly agree that “physical education helps children prepare to become active, healthy adults” (Adults-64% Teens-54%) and “helps children build social skills as well as physical strength and coordination” (Adults-64% Teens-53%). In fact, almost half (46%) of the adults strongly agree that participating in physical education as a child helped them to become active, healthy adults.

### **Frequency of Physical Education Classes**

- “ 56% of adults with children in the household (aged 6-17) say that their child does not have physical education class daily. 47% of teens say they do not have daily physical education class.
  
- “ About half (48%) of teens believe that they have the right amount of physical education classes. Two out of five teens (42%) say they would take physical education classes more if available, and only 9% would take them less often than they currently do.

### **Physical Education Class and Child’s Academic Needs**

- “ The vast majority (91%) of American adults who have children in the household (aged 6-17) believe that physical education class does not interfere with children’s academic needs.

- “ Less than one-quarter of adults and teens feel that “children should concentrate on academic subjects at school, and leave the physical activities for after school” (Adults-15% Teens-21%). Parents and teens are not concerned that “physical education classes in schools are dangerous” (Adults-90% Teens-94%).
- “ Most adults and teens strongly believe that “participation in team sports helps children learn lessons about discipline and teamwork that are important and will help them in the future” (Adults-67% Teens-69%).

### **What Students Like/Dislike about Physical Education**

- “ When asked to name what they like about physical education class, teens’ top mentions are: the opportunity to have exercise (20%), getting fit (18%), it’s fun (16%) and the activities offered (16%). Only 5% said they don’t like anything about it.
- “ Teens’ top mentions for things they dislike are: running (13%), boring activities (no variety) (9%), and dressing/undressing for class (7%).

### **Learning in Physical Education Class**

- “ When asked to name what teens think they should be learning in physical education class, half (52%) responded that they should be learning how to stay fit. Other top mentions included learning skills and rules for different physical activities (20%) and learning how their body works (10%).

### **Adult Physical Activity**

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### **Getting Enough Physical Activity to Maintain A Healthy Lifestyle**

The majority of adults (60%) feel that they are getting enough physical activity to maintain a healthy lifestyle. (The U.S. Surgeon General’s Report on Physical Activity and Health, 1996, the most prominent piece of public information

concerning physical activity up to that time, reported that 60% are not getting enough physical activity.)

### **Things Which Prevent Adults From Getting Enough Physical Activity**

- “ Those who do believe they’re not getting enough physical activity say it’s because of their job (33%), lack of interest or motivation (27%), not having enough time (19%) or health problems (13%).

Adults with children in a household also indicate that childcare is a barrier to getting more physical activity.

### **Weekly Exercise**

- “ Nearly three quarters of American adults report getting at least some exercise for a period of at least 30 minutes per week, with an average of 3.8 times a week.
  - Men, those who are younger, those with some college education or more and those who participated in interscholastic sports as a child are more likely to report getting some weekly exercise.

### **Interscholastic Sports Participation as a Child**

- “ 61% of the adults surveyed reported that they participated in interscholastic sports as a child.

### **Child’s Physical Activity**

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### **Importance of Child Being Physically Fit**

- “ Not surprisingly, nearly all (99%) adults with children in the household (aged 6-17) feel that it is important for the child to be physically fit, with 80% believing this to be extremely important.

### **Daily Physical Activity of Child**

- “ Americans with children in the household report that their child spends an average of 1.2 hours daily doing physical activities, not including physical education class. Adults with children in the household reported the top activities outside of school for their children are basketball (24%), baseball/softball (19%), bicycling (11%), soccer (10%), football (9%) and swimming (9%).

### **Setting Limits on Time Children Spend on Activities**

- “ The majority of adults report that they set limits on the time their children spend doing certain activities, such as playing video games or playing on the computer (59%) and television watching (57%). Less than half (41%) attempt to control time spent on other non-homework related activities.

### **Teens and Physical Activity**

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### **Eating A Balanced Diet**

- “ Most teens ages 12-17 (79%) say that they eat a balanced diet that includes grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy, proteins, fats or oils and sweets.
  - Younger teens (aged 12-14) are slightly more likely than those ages 15-17 to report they eat a balanced diet (83% vs. 75%).

### **School Team Sports Participate In**

- “ Two out of three teens (67%) report participation in a team sport at school. The top sports participated in are: basketball (23%), baseball/softball (17%), football (15%), track and field (13%), soccer (12%) and volleyball (11%).
- “ When asked to name the physical activities offered in school physical education which they like the most, teens’ top mentions are: basketball (34%), football (17%), volleyball (14%), soccer (13%), baseball/softball (13%) and track and field (10%).

## **Adult vs. Teen Opinions on Physical Fitness and Health**

### **Youth Physical Fitness**

- “ The majority (69%) of Americans with children in the household believe their children are fit, with one-quarter (28%) seeing them as extremely fit. By comparison, only half (54%) of teens ages 12-17 believe that they, are fit, with only 12% viewing themselves as extremely fit.

### **Things Which Prevent Children From Getting Enough Physical Activity**

- “ Adults with children in the household believe that their children are not fit primarily because of lack of interest or motivation (24%), not enough time (13%) and watching television (13%). On the other hand, teens who believe they aren’t fit mention not having enough time (24%), doing homework (19%), and lack of interest or motivation (13%) as the main deterrents to their getting more physical activity. Overall, adults tend to feel that the child doesn’t get enough physical activity because he/she lacks interest or motivation while teens tend to feel they just don’t have enough time for physical activity due to homework or other things.

### **Importance of Proper Hydration**

- “ Nearly all (99%) adults think that proper hydration is extremely or somewhat important to maintaining good health, with most (88%) seeing this as extremely important. Similarly, nearly all (98%) teens ages 12-17 view proper

hydration as extremely or somewhat important to maintaining good health, but with much less (58%) thinking it is extremely important.

### **Daily Eight-Ounce Glasses of Liquid**

- “ American adults report consuming an average of 8.7 eight-ounce glasses of liquid in a normal day. Teens (ages 12-17) report slightly less--7.0 eight-ounce glasses of liquid daily.

### **Favorite Drink to Quench Thirst**

- “ The majority of adults (59%) say water is their favorite thirst quencher. Other beverages mentioned are: soft drinks (16%), fruit juice (8%), iced tea (5%) and sports drinks (3%). Teens primarily choose water (38%) and soft drinks (23%) as well as fruit juice (19%), sports drinks (8%) and milk (8%).
  - Among adults, those 55 years and over who get some weekly exercise are more likely than other adults to say water is their favorite thirst quencher (66% versus 57%).

### **Survey Methodology**

This survey, conducted by Opinion Research Corporation International of Princeton, NJ, through the company's CARAVAN weekly national telephone omnibus service, is based on interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,017 adults (18 years of age and older, 50% male/50% female) and 500 teens, ages 12-17. The margin of error for the adult sample is + or – 3 percentage points; when broken into subgroups (those with children in the household) the margin of error is + or – 6 percentage points. The margin of error for the teen sample is + or – 4 percentage points. All interviewing was done from February 3-6, 2000, for adults and February 3-7,2000, for teens.

#### Footnotes:

- 1 Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 1995.

2 International Life Sciences Institute, *Improving Children's Health through Physical Activity: A New Opportunity, A Survey of Parents and Children about Physical Activity Patterns*, July 1997.

3 Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, *Guidelines for School and Community Programs: Promoting Lifelong Physical Activity*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, March 1997.

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