

**To all Major Political Parties and Candidates,
Federal Election 2010
Support for Health and Physical Education in Schools**

The Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation is seeking your support and commitment to quality Health and Physical Education (HPE) as a priority in the new Australian K-10 curriculum. As a candidate in the coming Federal election ACHPER is seeking affirmation of your commitment to this educational entitlement for all children.

We recognise that there will always be pressures on the curriculum. We are, however, deeply concerned that the well-being of our young people is under threat from a wide range of health risks.

You will be aware of growing concerns about issues of lifestyle related chronic disease, alcohol, tobacco and drug problems, injury prevention, mental health and the rising tide of obesity. Approximately a quarter of our children are already overweight or obese, and even if current trends get no worse, the life expectancy for Australian children alive today will fall two years by the time they are 20 years old. This is a legacy that we should not leave our children, and the education system has a vital role to play in addressing these issues.

Education plays a critical role in equipping young Australians with the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills to lead healthy active lives and in developing behaviours that will keep them healthy well beyond their school years. A high priority for health and physical education in schools has been recommended by the National Preventative Health Task Force, and the Crawford Report on Sport and Recreation.

We also note the special importance of health and physical education in schools for disadvantaged populations. Given the wealth of evidence on the contribution of preventable death and disease to the Aboriginal life expectancy gap, quality HPE as a priority in schools would play a vital role in addressing this issue.

ACHPER seeks your support for the following commitments:

- A minimum 150 minutes per week of physical education for all K-10 students.
- A minimum 80 minutes per week of health education for all K-10 students.

The health of our children is a priority for all sides of Government. We look forward to hearing how you will support this priority.

Yours sincerely



Jeff Emmel,
National Executive Director
Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation



214 Port Road (PO Box 304)
Hindmarsh, South Australia 5007

P: (08) 8340 3388

F: (08) 8340 3399

E: custserv@achper.org.au

W: www.achper.org.au

Also incorporating:

Healthy Lifestyles Bookshop

E: sales@healthylifestylesbookshop.com.au

W: www.healthylifestylesbookshop.com.au

Active and Healthy Children Make Better Learners (ACHPER) August 2010

Background

Numerous recent studies have now debunked the common misconception that spending class-time on physical education and physical activity in schools is an unaffordable luxury for schools keen to improve academic results in students.

The evidence is clear - healthy and active children perform better academically. The prioritising of Health and Physical Education in the Australian Curriculum will not only support children to lead healthy and active lives, but will also support their achievement across the curriculum.

Overview of Relevant Research Findings

The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, Atlanta USA) in April 2010 examined 50 scientific studies into the association between school-based physical activity, physical education, and academic performance. The following findings were made:-

- When children and adolescents participate in the recommended level of physical activity—at least 60 minutes daily—multiple health benefits accrue.
- There is substantial evidence that physical activity can help improve academic achievement (including grades and standardized test scores).
- Physical activity can have an impact on cognitive skills and attitudes and academic behaviour, all of which are important components of improved academic performance. These include enhanced concentration and attention as well as improved classroom behaviour.
- Increasing or maintaining time dedicated to physical education may help, and does not appear to adversely impact, academic performance.

A study conducted by Christian K. Roberts, PhD, Benjamin Freed, BA, and William J. McCarthy, PhD in 2010 entitled “Low Aerobic Fitness and Obesity Are Associated with Lower Standardized Test Scores in Children”, tested 1989 5th, 7th, and 9th grade students to investigate whether aerobic fitness and obesity in school children are associated with standardized test performance. Key findings from their study included

- The results confirm and extend previous findings that aerobic fitness is associated with enhanced performance on standardized achievement tests.
- Aerobic fitness levels predict performance on standardized tests.
- There may be links between these lifestyle behaviours and learning, and objective academic performance.
- When adding a daily physical activity program to existing primary school curricula, there was no evidence of any loss of academic performance as measured by arithmetic and reading tests despite a 45- to 60-minute loss of formal teaching time each day.
- Mechanistic studies of cognitive function suggest a positive effect of physical activity on intellectual performance.

Research conducted with 350 Australian 5th grade students in seven schools around the country found that there were no significant differences in maths or reading skills between students who received additional physical education instruction (210 minutes per week) and those who only completed the standard three 30-minute periods of physical education per week (Dwyer, Coonan, Leitch, Hetzel, & Baghurst, 1983).

The above research findings compel governments and education policy makers to recognise the significant benefits of children’s involvement in physical education and physical activity programs during school time. ACHPER therefore seeks a commitment to:-

- A minimum 150 minutes per week of physical education for all K-10 students.
- A minimum 80 minutes per week of health education for all K-10 students.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *The association between school-based physical activity, including physical education, and academic performance*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2010.

Dwyer, T., Coonan, W. E., Leitch, D. R., Hetzel, B. S., & Baghurst, R. A. (1983).

An investigation of the effects of daily physical activity on the health of primary school students in South Australia. International Journal of Epidemiology, 12(3), 308–313.

Roberts CK, Freed B, McCarthy WJ. *Low aerobic fitness and obesity are associated with lower standardized test scores in children*. J Pediatr 2009;156:711-8.