



NASPE Resource Brief ***The Difference Between Physical Education and Physical Activity***

Physical education and physical activity both contribute to the development of healthy, active children. However, many today are confused about what exactly physical education and physical activity are. Physical activity is not analogous to physical education. Physical education programs offer the best opportunity to provide physical activity to all children and to teach them the skills and knowledge needed to establish and sustain an active lifestyle. Instruction in this curricular area is delivered in the school setting by qualified teachers who assess student knowledge, motor and social skills in a safe, supportive environment. Physical education teaches youth how to be physically active in safe, equitable and healthful ways.

Physical activity is bodily movement of any type and may include recreational, fitness, and sport activities. In fact, physical activity is almost anything that involves the muscular and skeletal systems. Physical activity should be part of a physical education class, but it can also be incorporated into other academic subject areas, including recess, and before and after school physical activity programs.

Physical education teaches how to be wise consumers of physical activity. It is not enough to be just physically active; participants need to realize the benefits, skill techniques, training principles, values and appreciations of a physically active lifestyle. Based on a sequence of learning, physical education should not be compared to or confused with other physical activity experiences such as recess, intramurals, athletics, marching band and other recreational activities. Quality physical education programs offer learning opportunities, appropriate instruction, and meaningful and challenging pedagogical experiences for all participants.

NASPE Resources

- [Is It Physical Education or Physical Activity?](#) – NASPE believes every child deserves both a quality physical education and physical activity program. Understanding the difference between the two is critical to understanding why both contribute to the development of healthy, active children.
- [What Constitutes a Quality Physical Education Program?](#) – NASPE position statement outlining the components of a quality physical education program.
- [Integrating Physical Activity Into the School Day](#) – NASPE guidance document with suggestions and resources for integrating physical activity throughout the school day for students and staff.
- [Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs Package](#) – Various resources discuss the importance and elements of a comprehensive school physical activity program. These position statements together form the Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program Package.

Other Resources

- [National Physical Activity Plan](#) – The National Physical Activity Plan is a comprehensive set of policies, programs, and initiatives that aim to increase physical activity in all segments of the American population.
- [Healthy People 2020](#) – Healthy People 2020 provides science-based, 10-year national objectives for improving the health of all Americans.
- [Support REAL Teachers](#) – Teachers committed to relevant and meaningful quality physical education. REAL teachers use practices that help students develop the skills, knowledge, and values needed to be physically active for the rest of their lives.



National Association for
Sport and Physical Education
an association of the American Alliance for Health,
Physical Education, Recreation and Dance

NASPE Sets the Standard

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Other Resources, con't

- [John Ratey, MD](#) – Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and author of *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*. SPARK is a groundbreaking exploration of the connection between exercise and the brain's performance.
- [Dr. John Ratey Interview](#) – YouTube interview with Dr. John Ratey on the connection between exercise and the brain's performance.
- [Brain Rules](#) – In Brain Rules, Dr. John Medina, a molecular biologist, shares his lifelong interest in how the brain sciences might influence the way we teach our children and the way we work.

Contact Info

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