

Why Johnny can't run

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Most states fall short of recommended physical education guidelines, researchers say.

(HealthDay) -- Mandates for physical education in most of the United States fall short of the guidelines set forth by the National Association of Sport and Physical Education, according to a new study.

Researchers from the University of Georgia conducted a nationwide study and found that only six [states](#) require the 150-minute-per-week recommendation for elementary [school physical education](#). Just two states mandate the middle school guidelines and no states enforce the high school guidelines; the recommendations are 225 minutes a week at both levels, the researchers found.

In conducting the study, the researchers examined the mandates for school-based physical education in all 50 states.

Among the states with the strongest mandates for physical education was New Jersey, which required 3.75 physical-education credits to graduate from high school. This equals 187.5 minutes per week, still 37.5 minutes below the recommended 225 minutes.

The study also found the physical education mandates in some states were vague. For instance, Iowa's requirement states: "...[pupils](#) in kindergarten through grade five shall engage in physical activity for a minimum of 30 minutes each school day." Schools could interpret this as 30 minutes of recess, the researchers said.

"Recess does not guarantee 30 minutes of moderate to [vigorous physical activity](#)," the study's author, Bryan McCullick, professor of [kinesiology](#) at the University of Georgia, said in a university news release.

"Unfortunately, many legislators and [school officials](#) think the opposite."

The study also found that the physical education mandate in Wisconsin requires the class to be offered at least three times per week, but doesn't require a minimum length of time for the class. The researchers noted school officials in the state could meet that mandate with just 10 minutes of physical education three times per week.

"Findings indicated that statutes were written in a manner that did not explicitly mandate school-based physical education but rather recommended or suggested it," said McCullick.

The study's authors pointed out that federal courts typically do not interfere with the decisions of state lawmakers on school curricula.

"This lack of a judicial safety net strengthens the need for clear legislative guidance if the statutes are to be interpreted in a way that will consistently adhere to the guidelines," the study's authors wrote.

Because of a lack of state mandates, physical education is being reduced or eliminated in many schools across the nation, making it more difficult to combat obesity in children, researchers said.

"The first step to ensuring children have a healthy level of school-based physical education is to ensure that states have mandates regarding quality physical education with clear requirements," concluded McCullick. "Then we need to implement a surveillance system to ensure schools adhere to the mandate. Until those are in place we can't fairly determine the benefits of school-based P.E."

The study was published recently in the *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*.

The National Association of Sport and Physical Education includes physical-education teachers, athletic trainers, coaches and athletic directors, among other professionals.

More information:

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides more information on [young people and physical activity](#).

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