

Survey underscores connection between PE. teachers, principals

A new survey of physical education teachers reveals that more than half of the respondents consider their principal “very supportive” of the physical education program. However, the survey found that support diminished in the higher grades, thus making it necessary for PE teachers to fully engage students in the curriculum.

Key points

- Survey finds most principals supportive of PE programs.
- Principal support highest at elementary level; lowest in high school.
- Use technology to engage students in PE classes. ■

“Overall, most teachers felt their building principal was very supportive,” said Cheryl Richardson, senior program manager for physical education at the National Association for Sport and

Physical Education in Reston, Va. “They want the PE teacher to succeed, but sometimes they’re not sure what good PE looks like.”

The strongest principal support was felt by elementary school teachers (67 percent), followed by middle school teachers (54 percent), and high school teachers (49 percent). The numbers may be reflective of the time devoted to PE. “For example, by the time students get to high school, PE may not be a required class.”

The assessment focus over the past decade may be another reason for lower high school support percentages. “Principals are incredibly busy and there is so much pressure on them to respond to the demands of NLCB,” Richardson said. “Their inattention to PE is an unintended consequence of the NLCB assessment focus.”

Embrace technology

On the technology front, 76 percent of the PE teachers surveyed reported using technology as a management tool such as recording assessment scores. The most frequently used technologies are computer/internet (72 percent), pedometers (70 percent), fitness assessment tools (51 percent), heart rate monitors (39 percent), and exergames/active video games (32 percent).

Exergaming is becoming a big topic as PE teachers make greater use of devices such as the Nintendo Wii. “It’s about using the technology the students

are already familiar with to take PE to the next level to help students improve fitness,” Richardson said. However, PE teachers should learn what’s out there and be competent with the technology. After all, “plugging in the Wii and sticking in a video game is not high quality PE,” Richardson said. “The technology should be used to support the curriculum. There needs to be teaching and learning going on.”

Open survey doors

A proactive approach to involving students and parents is to survey them about their satisfaction about the school’s physical education program. Unfortunately, only 41 percent of respondents said that they had surveyed their students over the past three years. Just 13 percent said that they had surveyed the parents of their students during the same time frame. “Ultimately, the students are the customer,” Richardson said. “It’s important to ensure you’re meeting their needs.”

Student surveys should be structured based on the student’s age: For example, in 10th grade, the students are close to their adult life. Consider a field trip to the local health club to examine what it takes to be a member and what the club can offer as they transition from high school activity levels. At the elementary level, it’s important they have a good attitude about physical activities.

Also, PE teachers should consider parent surveys during parent-teacher conferences and back-to-school nights. Invite parents to visit the gym to inform about PE program and keep them informed on events during PE classes.

“For example, if students respond that they’re interested in skateboarding, that’s an area that could be added to the curriculum if there’s a skatepark in the town,” Richardson said. “PE can take advantage of that and teach skateboarding skills and safety.”

If you want a skateboarding program, you’ll need to purchase equipment such as skateboards and protective gear. By effectively communicating with parents, you may be able to get support from the parent-teacher organization for additional funding.

A total of 1,164 k-12 physical education teachers completed the survey, which was conducted by NASPE and Polar, between May 28 and June 15, 2009.

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