

MEDIA RELEASE

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AUSTRALIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS MISGUIDED

The Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) Victorian Branch has condemned the position of the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA), which argues there should be four core areas taught in primary schools – English literacy, Mathematics, Science and Social Education. Disappointingly, and without an objective rationale, Health, Physical Education and Sport are excluded from this core group.

The Principals association dismissively states that schools can offer other activities, such as ‘sport and physical activity’ but for children to be involved in these areas, they would need to make satisfactory progress in core areas beforehand.

This is not logical and completely ignores the body of research that is indicating a strong link between academic achievement and Physical Education. Studies are showing that children who receive Physical Education have an acceleration of their psychomotor development and this could actually accelerate learning. In primary schools, time spent on Physical Education may enhance the very areas of literacy and numeracy. It may also reduce boredom and assist children to be more engaged in the classroom.

Physical Education could also enhance academic skills through: increased cerebral blood flow, greater arousal, changes in hormone levels, enhanced nutrient intake, changes in body build and increased self-esteem.

On the flip-side, research has shown that when children are offered regular Physical Education, there has been no decline in their academic performance despite less time being devoted to such areas.

In addition schools can play an important role in contributing to the health of children. Associate Professor Jeff Walkley, Victorian President of the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation says “A move to marginalise Physical Education in this way is short sighted, given the alarming statistics on childhood obesity, which are indicating epidemic proportions. If Physical Education is not grouped among the core areas it will be perceived as not important and children will be denied an important opportunity to learn about healthy living.”

“During the past 20 years, the percentage of young people who are overweight has almost doubled, and those who are obese has tripled. The importance of Physical Education should be growing, not declining. It plays a unique and critical role in teaching children the skills and knowledge to lead a healthy lifestyle. No other subject does this- why would any clear thinking society deny children an opportunity to learn about how to lead a healthy life?”

“In Victoria an attempt to marginalise Physical Education in this way was made in 2004. There was an overwhelming response to reinstate Physical Education as a core area of the curriculum from parents, teachers, students, Sporting Associations and health agencies – over 16,000 signatures were submitted on a petition submitted to the Minister for Education.”

“The Australian Primary Principals Association needs to be aware of the strength of opposition to its’ position and work to meet community needs and engage parents to support them. The health of Australian children is not negotiable.”

AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW

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