

PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SCHOOL SPORT FOR ALL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN AUSTRALIA



Submission to the 2020 Summit



Evidence from several sources indicates that an Australia-wide decline in the number of schools teaching physical education and sport has occurred. Recent evidence suggests this decline has been most severe in less well resourced communities, highlighting the probability of an inequitable distribution of community resources to those less privileged. This phenomenon coincides with an unprecedented increased prevalence of overweight and obesity, as well as concerns about the increasing social isolation and decline in community connection among young Australians.

Physical education and school sport are *significantly* different to other areas of the curriculum. These subjects are the only curriculum areas that have the potential to impact on the physical health of children. These subjects offer instruction and knowledge about health related physical fitness, motor skill development and sport education. For the majority of young people, schools are the main providers of quality instruction in sport, recreation and physical activities. Further, these subjects are being used innovatively in Australia and overseas as mechanisms through which students who have exhibited signs of educational disengagement can be encouraged to regularly attend school and benefit from the educational and social support services available therein.

Physical education and sport have been suggested by some groups as being of low educational priority and should become 'optional' subjects in schools. In support of this suggestion groups have argued that time devoted to physical education and sport will be time lost for use in other subjects (ie mathematics, English and science) and this in turn will lead to a decline in the academic performance of children in these subjects. However, a recent review¹ of research-based evidence has shown that:

1. Sacrificing physical education for classroom time DOES NOT improve academic performance.
2. Students whose time in physical education and school sport was increased MAINTAINED OR IMPROVED their grades and scores on standardised achievement tests, even though they received less classroom instruction time than students in control groups.
3. Short activity breaks during the school day can improve students' concentration and classroom behaviour.

Worldwide, health agencies are advocating for physical education and sport to be a compulsory part of the school curriculum. Encouragingly, many Governments have heeded this call and have required that schools provide physical education and sport for children during the compulsory years of education. In order to provide a comprehensive educational experience to meet the needs of Australian children, the Australian Government should:

1. require that all children receive regular physical education and sport as part of their education experience during the compulsory years of schooling;
2. adequately resource schools to deliver quality physical education and school sport; and
3. ensure pre-service and in-service teachers are appropriately trained to deliver physical education and school sport.

1. Active Education: Physical education, physical activity and academic performance. Active Living Research: www.activelivingresearch.org.