

## Alabama State Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance

### Position Statement on Physical Education Class Size

In order to maintain student safety and ensure that quality instruction can occur, the Alabama State Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance supports the recommendation of the Society of Health and Physical Educators that physical education class size should be consistent with those of other subject areas (11, 12, 13, 14).

As class size increases above recommended levels, safe and effective instruction may become compromised. This can manifest itself in many ways including:

- Increased risk of student injury
- Increased opportunity for off task behavior of students
- Decreased instructional time due to management issues
- Insufficient amounts of equipment and activity space
- Decreased practice opportunities resulting in a slower rate of learning
- Decreased student time spent in activity during class
- Decreased individualized instruction

Student safety is an inherent responsibility of schools. Recommendations related to class size for physical education are often not enforced, thus placing students in unsafe environments. Physical educators, through no fault of their own, are often required to teach classes of 75 students or more. The foundation of a physical education classroom is movement; when coupled with too many students in an inadequate space, student safety is compromised. An overcrowded, dynamic environment places teachers, administrators, and school system personnel in a litigious situation when a student is injured.

Quality physical education programs “provide students with a planned, sequential, K-12 standards-based program of curricula and instruction designed to develop motor skills, knowledge and behaviors for active living, physical fitness, sportsmanship, self-efficacy and emotional intelligence” (15). A well-designed, quality physical education program: “meets the needs of all students; keeps students active for most of physical education class time; teaches self-management; emphasizes knowledge and skills for a lifetime of physical activity; and is an enjoyable experience for all students (3).” A barrier to quality physical education is large class sizes. A direct correlation exists between large class sizes and the teacher’s ability to deliver a quality program, characterized by maximum participation of all students (2, 4, 8). Multiple studies have shown smaller class sizes produce higher academic achievement, increased concentration, a reduction in disruptive behaviors, increased moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, more individualized attention, and provide teachers with more flexibility to use different instructional approaches and assignments (5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 16).

Much of the research supports the view that larger class sizes negatively impact learning in all academic settings. Additionally, student safety is more concerning within the physical education setting. Questions remain regarding the most appropriate classroom size for physical education classes. Regardless, literature suggests the best practices environment for providing quality physical education is much different than the current situation in most Alabama schools.

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