

# Benefits of Supporting Healthy Physical Activity Behaviors in School Districts

Research and guidance for School Health Advisory Councils when revising district wellness policies or regulations to establish a safe and supporting environment that encourages healthy physical activity behaviors.

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# Introduction

In 2005, the 79<sup>th</sup> Legislature adopted [Texas Health and Safety Code Section 1001.0711](#). This section directed the Executive Commissioner of the Health and Human Services Commission to establish the Texas Health Advisory Committee (TSHAC) by rule. The purpose of TSHAC is to provide a leadership role for the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) in the support for and delivery of coordinated school health programs and school health services. In 2007, the 80<sup>th</sup> Legislature expanded TSHAC's responsibilities to assess the effectiveness and develop recommendations for coordinated health programs provided by schools. [Texas Administrative Code, Rule §37.350](#) lists the rules and responsibilities of TSHAC.

The Benefits of Supporting Healthy Physical Activity Behaviors in School Districts document was developed by TSHAC in 2011 to assist SHACs in revising or updating local Wellness Policies or other district policies/regulations to support healthy physical activity behaviors in school districts. The TSHAC Chair established the subcommittee in the November 1, 2021, meeting. The goal of this subcommittee was to update the research and recommendations of the original Benefits of Supporting Healthy Physical Activity Behaviors in School Districts document. DSHS provided administrative support for this subcommittee by scheduling meetings, compiling research, and posting the TSHAC research and resources document to the Texas School Health Advisory Committee: Recommendations webpage.

The Benefits of Supporting Healthy Physical Activity Behaviors in School Districts document was approved by TSHAC at the September 12, 2022, meeting.

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# Purpose

The Texas School Health Advisory Committee (TSHAC) created this resource document as a reference for how school districts can support healthy physical activity behaviors among students. Local school health advisory committees (SHACs) or school boards can reference this information when they revise their district wellness policies or regulations regarding physical activity, physical education, and/or recess.

Physical activity in childhood can establish healthy habits for life-long health and well-being. Many factors influence physical activity behaviors in children and adolescents. School districts can have a substantial influence in supporting or undermining healthy behaviors. School districts should encourage children to be physically active while establishing safe and supporting environments that reinforce healthy behaviors. Motivating students to pursue and continue active lifestyles is an obtainable goal. It is an effective strategy to reduce the likelihood of chronic diseases from inactivity.

Physical activity means bodily movement by muscles that spends more energy than normal activities. It provides the following health benefits for children:

- Improves attention, memory, processing speed, and academic performance;
- Strengthens bones;
- Builds muscular strength and endurance;
- Reduces the risk of developing chronic disease risk factors;
- Reduces risk of depression;
- Helps maintain normal blood sugar levels;
- Lowers blood pressure; and
- Regulates body weight and reduces body fat.



Using physical activity to punish or manage behavior can be physically and emotionally harmful to children. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011), using physical activity as a punishment can lead to negative associations with physical activity. This can result in lower adoption of healthy behaviors. Removing students from physical activity as a form of punishment can also have detrimental effects on their health. The student no longer receives the health benefits from physical activity nor are

they able to gain the knowledge and skills needed to establish healthy habits. Examples of inappropriate use of physical activity include:

- Requiring students to run laps for misbehavior;
- Forcing students to do push-ups for tardiness;
- Withholding recess time to control behavior or to do unfinished work; and
- Making students run for losing a game or for poor individual performance.

Results from the Texas Education Agency's 2018-2021 School Health Survey (2021) reported that some schools permit some of these policies. About 8% of school survey respondents said that their school policy allowed staff to withhold physical activity from a student as punishment.

# Alternatives to Physical Activity as Punishment

Schools can create positive learning environments without using physical activity as punishment. School personnel can manage and motivate children by developing an effective preventive-management approach. No single solution works for all. Prevention is the key. There are best practice alternatives to using and withholding physical activity as punishment. Teachers and school support staff can use the following lists as guidance.

## Alternatives to the use of physical activity as punishment

- Bring positive attention to students who are demonstrating appropriate behaviors.
- On an individual basis, remind students about rules and expectations. Explain to students about the impact on the entire class when rules are not followed.
- Strive to connect with ALL students and create a community environment in your classroom.
- Remind students to correct their behavior.
- Allow for student choice in lesson planning.
- Include social and emotional learning into your curriculum; ensure connections to the competency of self-management and exhibiting self-discipline.

## Alternatives to withholding physical activity as punishment

- Create a space for students to use for conflict resolution and to reset.
- Include social and emotional learning into your curriculum; ensure connections to the competency of self-management and exhibiting self-discipline.
- Have a collection of extra shoes and clothes for students to borrow if theirs are not suitable for physical activity; allow students to participate if their clothing is safe.

# Policy Development

Developing policies related to physical activity as punishment is often complex. School staff may need to temporarily remove a child from a physical activity to stop an undesirable behavior. If a student's behavior threatens the safety of other students, removal is an appropriate action. In most instances, the removal should be very brief, including a cool down period and counseling. Students who receive special education services often have an individualized behavior intervention plan. It should be followed, developed, or revised, as needed.



The following is an example section of a recess policy related to the removal of students:

*Teachers should exhaust every reasonable alternative before considering redirecting recess for academic or disciplinary purposes. A teacher frequently redirecting recess shall meet with campus administration to evaluate the effectiveness of this choice for the student(s) involved.*

TSHAC recommends that SHACs review the following position statements and research on physical activity in schools.

# Policies and Recommendations of National Physical Activity Organizations

## SHAPE America

The Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE America) is a national organization that provides programs and resources that support an active school climate. They released the [Physical Activity Should Not Be Used as Punishment and/or Behavior Management document](#) in 2021 to address the inappropriate use or withholding of physical activity or physical education as a disciplinary consequence or behavior management strategy. Below is a quote from the position statement.

*"SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators asserts the position that withholding physical activity (PA) and physical education (PE) as a form of punishment and/or behavior management is inappropriate. In addition, administering physical activity as punishment is inappropriate...."*

*Educators who use appropriate practices:*

- *Promote a physically active lifestyle;*
- *Provide a safe and inclusive learning environment, allowing students to experience positive, challenging, and enjoyable physical activity while learning about the benefits and importance of physical activity;*
- *Appreciate individual differences such as cultural identity, previous movement experiences, fitness and skill levels, and intellectual, physical, and social-emotional maturity; and*
- *Advocate for a positive school culture toward physical activity and physical education."*

## Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released the [School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity](#) as a response to the childhood obesity epidemic. The quote below is from the guidelines advising against using physical activity as punishment.

*"Teachers, coaches, and other school and community personnel should not use physical activity as punishment or withhold opportunities for physical activity as a form of punishment... Disciplining students for unacceptable behavior or academic performance by not allowing them to participate in recess or physical education"*



*prevents students from 1) accumulating valuable free-time physical activity and 2) learning essential physical activity knowledge and skills."*

CDC Healthy Schools webpage hosts resources and research on [Inclusive School Physical Education and Physical Activity](#). The webpage includes information on federal policies on inclusive school physical education and physical activity as well as where school can get more information on policies for inclusion. Below is a portion of the inclusion statement.

*"All students, regardless of ability, should get the recommended 60 minutes or more of daily physical activity. Schools can help all students meet this recommendation by providing equal opportunities for students with disabilities. Creating an inclusive culture for physical education and physical activity helps every student learn to lead a healthy and active lifestyle."*

## **National Association of State Boards of Education**

The National Association of State Boards of Education is a national nonprofit organization that to support state boards of education. They released the [Reengaging Students through Physical Activity](#). The document states the benefits of physical activity for students and why schools should encourage and promote healthy physical activities. Below is a quote from the document.

*"Physical activity improves students' academic achievement, behavior management, sense of connectedness, physical health, and emotional well-being... [P]romote [students'] well-being by prioritizing quality physical education and extracurricular programs to ensure that all students have opportunities for physical activity during the school year."*

## **National Conference of State Legislatures**

The National Conference of State Legislatures is a national organization to support interstate cooperation and exchanging information among state legislatures. NCSL released the [State Actions to Promote Healthy Communities and Prevent Childhood Obesity](#). This document encourages state legislatures to focus on support healthy eating and physical activity, primarily in schools. Below is a portion of the document.

*"School physical education programs offer the best opportunity to provide physical activity for all children and to teach them the skills and knowledge needed to establish and sustain an active lifestyle. Quality physical education offers learning*

*opportunities, appropriate instruction, meaningful and challenging content...*

*Recommended physical education program structure includes:*

- *Physical activity should never be used as punishment..."*

## **CANFIT**

The California Adolescent Nutrition and Fitness (CANFIT) organization works with community partners to implement best practices using scientific research. The [SOUL Principles for Physical Activity](#) provides guidance on how to best support physical activity programs. Below is an excerpt from the principals.

*"Remember to start with the SOUL when you are implementing a new physical activity program, game, sport or curriculum:*

*Create an Environment that Fosters Participation by All...*

*Provide a space structure for youth to lead activities...*

*Emphasize Health at Every Size...*

*Respect Different Cultures within your Program..."*

# Legislation

Current Texas legislation that was used to create the recommendation and this document are included below.

**Texas Education Code, Section 28.002 (d)(10-11).** Required Curriculum.

*"The physical education curriculum required under Subsection (a)(2)(c) must be sequential, developmentally appropriate, and designed, implemented and evaluated to enable students to develop the motor, self-management, and other skills, knowledge, attitudes, and confidence necessary to participate in physical activity throughout life. Each school district shall establish specific objectives and goals the district intends to accomplish through the physical education curriculum. In identifying the essential knowledge and skills of physical education, the State Board of Education shall ensure that the curriculum promotes student participation in physical activity outside of school and allows physical education classes to be an enjoyable experience for students."*

**Texas Education Code, Section 28.004 (c)(2)(B).** Local School Health Advisory Council and Health Education Instruction.

*"The board of trustees of each school district shall establish a local school health advisory council to assist the district in ensuring that local community values are reflected in the districts health education instruction. A school district must consider the recommendations of the local school health advisory council before changing the district's health education curriculum or instruction. Under Subsection (c)(2)(B): The local school health advisory council's duties include recommending: policies, procedures, strategies, and curriculum appropriate for specific grade levels designed to prevent physical health concerns, including, obesity, cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, and mental health concerns, including suicide, through coordination of physical education and physical activity."*

**Texas Administrative Code, Section 103.1201 (h)(4).** Standards for the Operation of School District Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs.

*"Each school district is responsible for the safety and supervision of the students assigned to the disciplinary alternative education program; however, the immunity from the liability established in the TEC, §22.0511, shall not be impacted. Each district shall establish a board-approved policy for discipline and intervention measures to prevent and intervene against unsafe behavior and include disciplinary actions that do not jeopardize students' physical health and safety, harm emotional well-being, or discourage physical activity."*

# Resources

**Texas School Health Advisory Committee**

[dshs.texas.gov/schoolhealth/tshac/](https://dshs.texas.gov/schoolhealth/tshac/)

**SHAPE (Society of Health and Physical Educators)**

[shapeamerica.org](https://shapeamerica.org)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:  
Physical Education and Physical Activity**

[cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/  
index.htm](https://cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/index.htm)

**U.S. Department of Health and Human  
Services: Physical Activity Guidelines**

[health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-  
09/Physical\\_Activity\\_Guidelines\\_2nd  
edition.pdf](https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-09/Physical_Activity_Guidelines_2nd_edition.pdf)

**Texas Education Agency: Physical Education**

[tea.texas.gov/academics/subject-areas/health-  
and-physical-education/physical-education.gov](https://tea.texas.gov/academics/subject-areas/health-and-physical-education/physical-education.gov)

**Texas School Health Program**

[dshs.texas.gov/schoolhealth/](https://dshs.texas.gov/schoolhealth/)

**School Health Advisory Councils**

[dshs.texas.gov/schoolhealth/shac/](https://dshs.texas.gov/schoolhealth/shac/)

**National Association of State Boards of Education**

[nasbe.org/reengaging-students-through-physical-activity/](https://nasbe.org/reengaging-students-through-physical-activity/)

**Texas Association of School Boards**

[tasb.org/home.aspx](https://tasb.org/home.aspx)



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- Texas legislature online*. 87th legislature third called session: Texas legislature online. [capitol.texas.gov/](https://capitol.texas.gov/)
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***[dshs.texas.gov/schoolhealth](https://dshs.texas.gov/schoolhealth)***