

Back to School 2020: Recommendations for Alabama's K-12 Physical Education Programs

Back to School 2020: Recommendations for Alabama's K-12 Physical Education Programs is a working document that provides strategies and suggestions for schools to implement safe and effective physical education programs under Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and State of Alabama COVID-19 guidance. These re-entry considerations are intended to guide administrators and teachers as they prepare an environment for safe and supportive physical education instruction. Each school community has its own set of circumstances and characteristics that influence what is appropriate for its schools, thus, this is not a one size fits all list.

Included are overall suggestions as well as those specific to elementary, middle, and high school physical education programs. As a working document, additions and revisions will be provided as CDC and State guidance change. In addition, recommendations for virtual/distance learning will follow in a separate document.

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Back to School 2020: Recommendations for Alabama's K-12 Physical Education Programs (June 2020) was prepared by individuals representing the Alabama State Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (ASAHPERD); Lakeshore Foundation/NCHPAD; HEAL Alabama and the State Department of Education. Contributors include Ginger Aaron-Brush, Connie Dacus, Donna Dunaway, Penny Edwards, Donna Hester, Sherri Huff, Derrick Lane, Alex Martinez, Cindy O'Brien, and Jonathan Thompson.

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Introduction

The importance of physical education/activity and exercise for overall health and academic performance is well documented. Physical activity boosts the immune system, promotes health, and relieves stress. Evidence-based, scientific research also supports the importance of physical activity to a student's academic performance, mental health, self-concept, and overall well-being. Physical education is a key ingredient as schools work to educate the whole child – physically, emotionally, and socially.

Being active can decrease behavior problems in children and help them concentrate better on their schoolwork. According to Dr. John Ratey, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, exercise improves learning on three levels: *“First, it optimizes your mind-set to improve alertness, attention and motivation; second, it prepares and encourages nerve cells to bind to one another, which is the cellular basis for logging in new information; and third, it spurs the development of new nerve cells from stem cells in the hippocampus.”* In short, not only does exercise help the brain get ready to learn but it makes retaining information easier. Quality physical education provides the opportunity for exercise and physical activity to achieve the benefits described by Dr. Ratey.

The Alabama Board of Education and the State Department of Education are to be commended for supporting required physical education for Alabama's students. Thanks to this support, Alabama is a step ahead of many states in addressing the health and well-being of its students. Required physical education ensures that Alabama's students are achieving a portion of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Physical Activity Guidelines: *Children and adolescents ages 6 through 17 years should do 60 minutes (1 hour) or more of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity each day, including aerobic activity, activities that strengthen bones (like running or jumping) and that build muscles (like climbing or doing push-ups).*

The required standards in the Alabama Course of Study: Physical Education addresses the whole child. Standards 1-3 focus on motor skill and fitness development while standards 4 and 5 address social and emotional behaviors. Initiatives and strategies focusing on Social and Emotional Learning are inherent to the physical education classroom. It should be noted that the Alabama Course of Study: Physical Education supports the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Core Competencies.

Why Physical Education is Needed Now More than Ever

As educators continue to manage the challenges of COVID-19, the health and well-being of students become increasingly important. The physical, mental, social, and emotional health of Alabama's students must be the focus of all initiatives and recommendations as we move forward in a COVID-19 world.

When students return to school having experienced the stress associated with distance learning, being quarantined from their friends, and day-to-day activities, the need to provide physical education is perhaps more important than ever before. As stated above there is a direct correlation between physical activity, academic performance, and social and emotional health. If students return to school buildings in the fall, quality, daily physical education is a must. If distance learning returns, supporting, and encouraging physical education teachers to create, discover and provide virtual opportunities is vital. Keeping the focus on educating the whole child-physically, socially and emotionally-should serve as the guide.

In conclusion, Alabama's students deserve the opportunity for quality physical education every day. It is the responsibility of Alabama public schools to provide it.

Recommendations for Physical Education Grades K-12

The uniqueness of the physical education classroom presents many challenges as teachers strive to provide a safe and effective learning environment. Consideration must be given to scheduling, equipment, classroom protocol and the teaching environment.

Scheduling: Daily physical education instruction is required for a minimum of 30 minutes for Grades K-5 and 30-50 minutes for Grades 6-8. To meet this requirement and maintain physical distancing, modification of the daily physical education schedule will be necessary in most situations. Beginning Kinesiology is the mandated course that fulfills the high school graduation requirement for physical education. Scheduling of this course for students during their first year of high school is recommended (Alabama Physical Education Course of Study, 2019).

Elementary Schools: Typically, elementary school physical education classes are exceptionally large, often exceeding 75 or more students (i.e., 'grade level' physical education when all classrooms of the same grade level attend physical education at the same time). Lower pupil : teacher ratios are essential to limit the cross contact of students, to allow for physical distance between students, and to create a sense of calm for students during this stressful time. The modifications required are dependent on the individual situation, however, guidelines for physical distancing must be met.

- Modify classes so that one teacher has half of the class in the gym, while the other teacher has the other half of the students on the playground or other outdoor or indoor teaching space.
- Utilize classroom teachers to help maintain safe numbers for physical education classes. The physical education teacher should provide activity suggestions for classroom teachers such as energizers, brain boosters, or mindful minute activities that can be done where students stay close to their assigned desks.
- Schedule physical education on alternating days (students not with the physical education teacher should be provided with activities that can be done in the classroom). Use online resources to help students reach 30 minutes of daily physical education. The physical education teacher is still responsible for providing a lesson plan to the classroom teacher.
- Incorporate virtual physical education instruction within the school. If students must remain within their classroom instead of transitioning to the gymnasium or outside teaching space for physical education, the physical education teacher can teach "live" using technology such as Google Meet, Zoom Conferencing, Microsoft Teams, etc. During this instruction, the classroom teacher would supervise and monitor students inside the classroom while the physical education teacher is teaching the class virtually.
- Create schedules with adequate time between classes so cleaning of equipment can be done.

Middle Schools and High Schools: While the pupil-teacher ratio of middle and high school physical education classes is usually appropriate there are often large number of students and teachers sharing limited teaching areas. For example, there might be 4 physical education classes of 30 students each, taught by different teachers, sharing one gym. Classes must be organized to assure the recommended physical distancing guidelines are followed.

- Shorten the class time (e.g., 30-minute classes rather than 50-minute classes) and number of students attending class at the same time.
- Use pre-recorded instructional videos (created by physical education teachers) in students' homerooms supervised by the homeroom teacher.
- Incorporate virtual physical education instruction within the school with the physical education teacher teaching "live" using technology such as Google Meet, Zoom Conferencing, Microsoft Teams, etc. Homeroom teachers, or other appropriate school personnel would supervise and monitor students inside the classroom.
- Create schedules with adequate time between classes so cleaning of equipment can be done.

Teaching Environment: Although physical education is traditionally taught in a gymnasium or outdoor play field, lessons can be modified for smaller spaces including classrooms if physical distancing can be maintained.

All grade levels:

- Utilize all available indoor spaces: gymnasium, fitness lab, weight rooms, multi-purpose room, cafeteria, dance studio, empty classrooms, etc. Space should be organized to allow for physical distancing. A fitness lab/weight room utilizing equipment must establish a protocol for sanitizing equipment after usage.
- Conduct physical education classes outdoors using field space, track, blacktop, etc. whenever possible. Staff should monitor weather conditions to determine the setting and appropriate activity level for physical education class. Forty to ninety degrees is the recommended temperature for outdoor activities, with wind chill and heat index considered. (Alabama Physical Education Course of Study, 2019)
- If there is more than 1 physical education teacher, it is recommended to divide the physical education class so that part of the class is outside and the other is inside to reduce the number of students in the gymnasium.

Equipment: Equipment usage is fundamental to a physical education classroom. However, many activities require no equipment (dance, calisthenics, aerobic activities, mindfulness, and others). If equipment is used strategies must be developed to ensure that equipment is sanitized between usage.

All grade levels:

- Adjust budgets or purchasing priorities if possible, to purchase additional equipment to create individual or classroom PE kits.
- Use equipment that can be disinfected between classes (non-porous equipment such as coated balls, synthetic sports balls, vinyl bean bags, plastic/resin striking implements, plastic scooters, plastic/vinyl targets, plastic hula hoops, poly rope handles for parachute use, rubber floor spots/cones, etc.)
- Create learning activities that utilize limited amounts equipment. If possible, give each student their own piece of equipment.
- Create physical distance equipment bags for each student (beanbag, jump rope, yarn ball, scarves, hoop, etc.) if equipment cannot be sanitized after each use.
- Some pieces of equipment (bean bags, balls, scoops) can be created using readily available materials. Create a homework assignment for students (or ask for parent volunteers) to make

different types of small balls or scoops to use during class for the elementary level. Students could bring the equipment to class each day to help reduce the time spent cleaning and sanitizing.

Classroom Protocol: Organizational procedures are fundamental to the effectiveness and efficiency of a physical education class. Procedures must be clearly defined, understood by the students, and managed by the teachers to ensure learning takes place.

All grade levels:

- Provide clearly marked designated routes for entrance and exit of class. Consider dismissing students in waves.
- Ensure students use hand sanitizer when entering and leaving the physical education area. Post visual signs to remind students of proper handwashing techniques.
- Prohibit students from using water fountains. Allow students to bring water bottles to physical education class.
- Designate personal space for students' belongings (jackets, water bottles, etc.).
- Maintain 6 ft distance between students. Use markers to encourage physical distancing (chalk, paint, tape, polypots, etc.).
- Establish clear and concise routines/expectations to help students learn the concept of physical distance.
- Remind students to give verbal praise without handshakes, high fives, hugs, or fist bumps. Post visual signs to remind students of physical distance and non-touch praise.
- Sanitize equipment after student use. Have sanitization products available. Clean equipment prior to and after use. Clean high touch areas regularly.
- Use a megaphone or microphone to broadcast instruction due to increased physical distance.
- Eliminate unessential visitors from the class.
- Comply with the school face covering policy.

Middle Schools and High Schools

- Eliminate use of locker rooms. Encourage students to come to school dressed for physical education. Require students to wear closed toe shoes.

Curriculum: The Course of Study: Physical Education standards should continue to be the focus for lessons and activities that are safe and appropriate. Content should include motor skill development and performance (standards 1 and 2), health-enhancing physical activity and fitness (standard 3), personal and social behavior (standard 4) and Standard 5 (value of physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression and/or social interaction).

All grade levels:

- Exclude activities that require physical contact.
- Re-prioritize curriculum to focus on individual fitness, challenges, and learning targets. Focus more on individual skill work rather than small sided activities and competition.
- Use blended learning/flipped classroom for concepts related to standards, utilizing technology platforms.
- Include social and emotional learning activities for students.

- Avoid invasion games where students contact each other or use the same equipment. Games requiring student interaction or students being within 6 feet of each other should not be played. For example, playing soccer would not be appropriate because each team would be using/handling the same ball. However, you could teach soccer skills if everyone had their own ball.

Elementary Schools: At this level, the focus should be on helping students become skillful movers. Students are developing gross and fine motor control, physical strength and endurance, and coordination; therefore, individualized activities focusing on locomotor movements, rhythms/dance, manipulative skill development (throwing, kicking, dribbling, striking, etc.), and non-manipulative skill development (balancing, stretching, etc.) are most appropriate. These activities can be performed individually without shared use of equipment.

Middle Schools: Focus on individualized fitness activities (walk, jog, hike, resistance activities), biking, orienteering, scavenger hunts, dance and rhythms (no partner, circle or group dances), sport skills practice with individual piece of equipment (soccer, foot golf, disc golf, Frisbee, Pickleball, badminton, golf).

High Schools: The Beginning Kinesiology course includes individualized fitness activities, rhythms and movement skills needed to pursue a lifetime of physical activity should be the focus. Fitness activities including aerobic activities, weight training, resistance exercises, calisthenics, and flexibility exercises should be provided. Dance activities can range from line dance to dance for aerobic fitness. Ensuring that students have the movement skills needed to enjoy a lifetime of physical activity should also be a focus. Depending upon individual student need skill remediation might be needed. Content should also be taught relative to the importance of physical activity and healthy nutrition. At home/ community activities should also be encouraged—running clubs, cross country cycling, hiking, 5Ks and at home workout videos.

Tips for Including Students with Disabilities:

Students with compromised immune systems need to follow the guidance of their pediatricians for participating in physical education, physical activity and returning to school in general.

- Continue to utilize the program modifications and specially designed instruction contained in a student's IEP, or services/accommodations recommended by a student's 504 plan to support students with disabilities.
- Develop a plan, including school staff, to review each student IEP to determine the type of educational adjustments needed to compensate for the loss of instructional time and related services.
- Prepare students ahead of time for changes in the way activities are presented or changes in class routine. Some students with disabilities may have difficulty adjusting to a change. All students will benefit from a structured class routine.
- Match the instructional design to the available space – use stations, marked off areas, poly spots, etc., to ensure separation among students and that every student has adequate space to move and participate fully in the activity.
- Make sure students that utilize a mobility device have the necessary space to move in the designated space.

- Limit equipment use if possible. Utilize equipment that can be easily sanitized after each use.
- Avoid using homemade equipment that may include latex, due to allergies.
- Adjust budgets or purchasing priorities if possible, to purchase additional equipment to create individual or classroom PE kits.
- Focus on adaptations and/or modifications of all HPE decisions to ensure the full inclusion of all.
- Provide physical distancing instructions in various formats and ensure that students comprehend the instructions given.
- Ensure that students without disabilities understand that mobility or technology devices are included during physical distancing and should be off-limits.
- Ensure that the paraeducator understands the safety procedures adopted in class. The paraeducator should assist in creating a safe environment for the student.
- Utilize subjective perception methods such as the Rated Perceived Exertion (RPE) Scale instead of shareable heart rate monitors when assessing physical activity intensity.
- Help students to cope with their emotions towards receiving in-person instruction by adopting a social and emotional learning (SEL) framework or curriculum.
- Be familiar with the school's isolation protocol and contingency plans in the event of a confirmed or suspected Covid-19 case.
- Ensure that playing areas such as zones or individual spaces are clearly marked and that students understand their space assignments.
- Assign and distribute equipment before entering the class. If possible, prepare individual equipment bags with the student's names and stage them while maintaining a safe distance. Send students in small groups to retrieve their bags.
- Utilize a sound system when communicating with the students during class. Listening to instructions while maintaining physical distance can be challenging.
- Avoid activities that require assisted transfer from a seated position to the floor. If the student can transfer without assistance and if pads or mats are used to soften the impact of the transfer, ensure that those pads or mats are clean and sanitize.

Coming Soon: Inclusive Physical Education Toolkit - This toolkit will provide graphics, teaching strategies, equipment, and safety to provide a quality program for students in the school building or virtual that fully engages a student with disabilities. The toolkit will be located at www.nchpad.org/educators.

Additional Suggestions for Physical Education Teachers:

- Include COVID-19 safety strategies in lesson plans just in case a student contracts COVID-19 while at school.
- Communicate to students on the first day of class that physical education may be different than in the past and teach new safety protocols.
- Consider a Memorandum of Understanding (contract) between the student and teacher which states the student agrees to maintain safe distances from others, follow instructions provided by the physical education teacher, follow strategies and routines provided by the physical education teacher, follow game rules provided by the teacher and let the teacher know if they are feeling ill. This memo may serve to place more accountability on the student.
- Communicate with students every day the measures being taken to encourage physical distancing during the lesson. Documentation that you are implementing activities that encourage physical distancing is essential.

- Communicate and document needs and concerns to administration.
- Communicate with classroom teachers, administration, and parents on ways that you are keeping children safe in your class, while still providing quality physical education.

Resources:

Below are additional resources that will assist with providing a quality physical education experience for all students while practicing physical distancing. Click on the titles listed below linked to each resource or resource page. Resources and information will be updated as new information becomes available. Visit ASAHPERD's website at www.asahperd.org regularly for updates.

Physical Education and Activity Resources

[Alabama State Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance](#)

[Healthy Eating Active Living \(HEAL Alabama\)](#)

[National Center for Health, Physical Activity and Disability](#)

[Alabama State Dept. of Education Health and Physical Education](#)

[Online Physical Education Network \(OPEN\) 2020-2021 10-week block plan with priority outcomes](#)

[SHAPE America's 2020-2021 School Reentry Considerations: K-12 Physical Education, Health Education, and Physical Activity](#)

[Games for Social Distancing](#)

[Activities for Social Distancing](#)

[How to Keep Kids Active While Practicing Social Distancing](#)

[6 Equipment Ideas for Socially Distancing Physical Education Lessons](#)

[Healthy Children Information on COVID and Social Distancing](#)

[Move United Sports Organization](#)

[GoNoodle](#)

[PECentral](#)

[American Heart Association](#)

[EVERFI](#)

COVID-19 Information

[Center for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)

[Alabama Department of Public Health \(ADPH\)](#)

[Alabama State Department of Education \(ALSDE\)](#)

[Alabama High School Athletic Association \(AHSAA\)](#)