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## **Physical Education is Essential to a Complete Education**

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San Juan Physical Educators

## Physical Education Curriculum Goals and Objectives

In a letter to county and district superintendents from former State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O’Connell, the importance of high quality physical education is called out. “Physical education is important in the lives our youth and is an instructional priority in our schools. It helps to combat high levels of obesity and diabetes as well as to increase the mental function and alertness of students.” The letter goes on to state that it is “critical that physical education programs offer a planned and sequential instructional program that provides student the skills, knowledge, and confidence to be physically active throughout their lifetimes.” Districts “should design their physical education courses to ensure that students will receive instruction in all eight content areas, consistent with the requirements above.” (O’Connell, 2009)

High school physical education course curriculum is guided by the *Physical Education California Model Content Standards for California Public Schools* and the *Physical Education Framework for California Public Schools*. Each of these documents have been approved and adopted by the California State Board of Education. These documents clearly outline the specific goals and objectives that must be met during a physical education course. A high quality physical education program provides the curriculum and instruction that develops the knowledge, attitudes, skills, behavior, and motivation needed to be physically active for life (EC Section 33350). The physical education course must include physical activities “conducive to health and vigor of body and mind” (EC Section 51220[d]). EC Section 51220(d) and EC Section 33352(b)(7) require that a physical education course of study in grades nine through twelve include a developmentally appropriate sequence of instruction in the following eight areas:

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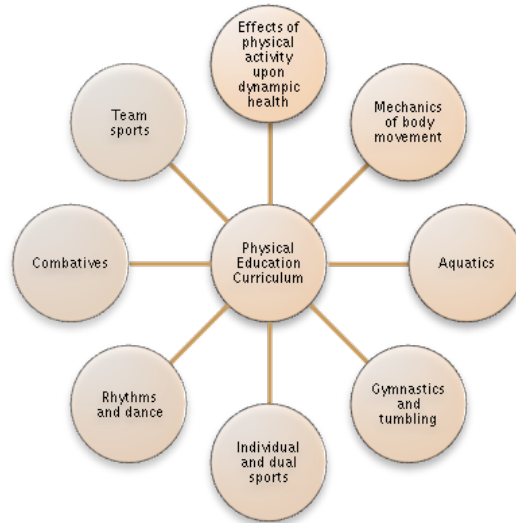


Figure 1.1 High School Physical Education Course of Study EC Section 51220(d) & Section 33352(b)(7)

The *Physical Education Framework for California Public Schools* based on the *Physical Education Model Content Standards for California Public Schools* provides a course model and structure for physical education programs to follow. High school course standards fall under three main priorities for instruction:

Standard 1: Students demonstrate knowledge of and competency in motor skills, movement patterns, and strategies need to perform a variety of physical activities.

(In High School Course 2 there are 12 individual standards within this priority. An example is Standard 1.5: Explain the use of the principles of biomechanics (leverage, force, inertia, rotary motion, and opposition); apply the principles to achieve advanced performance in combative, gymnastic/tumbling, and team activities; and evaluate the performance based on use of the principles.)

Standard 2: Students achieve a level of physical fitness for health and performance while demonstrating knowledge of fitness concepts, principles, and strategies.

(In High School Course 2 there are 11 individual standards within this priority. An example is Standard 2.7: Develop and implement an appropriate personal physical fitness program for a family or community member.)

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Standard 3: Students demonstrate knowledge of psychological and sociological concepts, principles, and strategies that apply to the learning and performance of physical activity.

(In High School Course 2 there are nine individual standards following the themes of Self-Responsibility, Social Interaction, and Group Dynamics that are within this priority. An Example is Standard 3.6: Identify the effects of individual differences, such as age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and culture, on preferences for and participation in physical activity.)

The *Physical Education Model Content Standards for California Public Schools* “highlight the fact that participation in physical activity is not the same as learning the content in physical education” (*Physical Education Framework for California Public Schools*, 2009). Physical activity and extra-curricular athletics are not enough. “To achieve the benefits of a comprehensive physical education program, all students must be given sufficient opportunities to attain the physical education learning standards at each grade and course level” (*Physical Education Framework for California Public Schools*, 2009). As with all other subject areas that must comply with the California Education Code, Physical Education programs are required to implement demanding standards that meet the requirements to succeed in our global community.

*EC 60602.5. (1) Develop and adopt a set of statewide academically rigorous content standards in all major subject areas to serve as the basis for modeling and promoting high-quality teaching and learning activities across the entire curriculum and assessing the academic achievement of pupils, as well as for schools, school districts, and for the California education system as a whole. Exclusive of those assessments established by a multistate consortium, produce performance standards to be adopted by the state board designed to lead to specific grade level benchmarks of academic achievement for each subject area tested within each grade level based on the knowledge, skills, and processes that pupils will need in order to succeed in the information-based, global economy of the 21st century.*

## Physical Education vs. High School Athletics

It can appear to the untrained eye that a high school athletic team and a physical education class present many commonalities. However, there are fundamental differences between the two and when examined more closely they are truly very different. As stated in the California Education Code, high school athletics are qualified under the category of a recreational activity. *EC Section 10901:*

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(c) "Recreation" means any activity, voluntarily engaged in, which contributes to the physical, mental, or moral development of the individual or group participating therein, and includes any activity in the fields of visual and performing arts, handicraft, science, literature, nature study, nature contacting, aquatic sports, and **athletics** or any of them, and any informal play incorporating any such activity.

Non-competitive activities that include students of all skill levels are the focus of quality physical education programs (Flores, 1995; Saunders et al., 2006; Neumark-Stainer et al., 2003). This is often not the case in an athletic program. The primary goal for a high school athletic team is to win, so the focus is on the competition and how to win. Often times the best athletes on the team get the most attention. The goal of winning can lead to an ego-oriented motivational climate where the emphasis is on demonstrating superior ability, not promoting individual skill development or improvement. A physical education class usually operates in a task-oriented environment, where the focus is on skill improvement, giving complete effort and mastering a task. The types of skills gained through a structured physical education class lead to increased physical activity levels sustained throughout a lifetime.

An athletic coach focuses on winning games, meets or matches, therefore all practice and game time is dedicated to skill and strategy development toward that sport or physical activity. The *Physical Education Model Content Standards for California Public Schools* lists 32 specific standards for Physical Education High School Course 2. A high school athletic sport could only teach some elements of 10 of these standards (and only if there were a real focus on teaching them). Most of the standards would fall under Standard 1, and participating in high school athletics rather than physical education would only teach knowledge or skill competency for combatives, gymnastics, or team activities (not all three). In a high quality physical education program, students would not only learn knowledge and skills for all three types of activities, they would also develop fitness, learn fitness concepts (Standard 2), and learn and apply psychological and sociological concepts (Standard 3) by learning all 32 of the standards for this course.

A high school athlete focuses on just one sport for a long period of time. A physical education student learns a variety of sports and activities, giving themselves a wider variety of physical activities to choose from as they are physically active for a lifetime. Rarely will a high school football player, shot

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putter, or wrestler still be participating in these sports when they are in their 40's. A well educated physical education student will have a plethora of activities to choose to participate in for their entire lives.

High school athletics can offer students an opportunity to be physically active, but that physical activity is not always moderate to vigorous, depending on the sport. A high quality physical education program focuses on providing students the opportunity to be moderately to vigorously physical active four days a week. Most sports also do not focus on developing balanced fitness, as a physical education program would. Cross country runners focus on cardiovascular endurance, but not muscular strength, while volleyball players focus on muscular strength and endurance, but not cardiovascular endurance. A high quality physical education program allows students to develop all components of fitness.

High school athletics are not the same as physical education. The physical education most frequently asked questions on the Livermore High School website states it best when asked if a student can get credit for physical education by participating in an athletic activity, either at school or outside of school: "No, athletics do not fulfill the California State Requirement for Physical Education or meet the Physical Education Model Content Standards for California Public Schools. High school athletics are an extra-curricular activity."

Although, the benefits that result from participation in an athletics program are numerous, though, these programs are not designed to meet the rigorous demands of standards as a physical education curriculum is required to do. With the similarities these two entities encompass, they compliment one another but the outcomes of each can be very different. It is clear these two platforms stand independently with an individual set of goals and objectives. Some examples of the similarities and differences are listed below.

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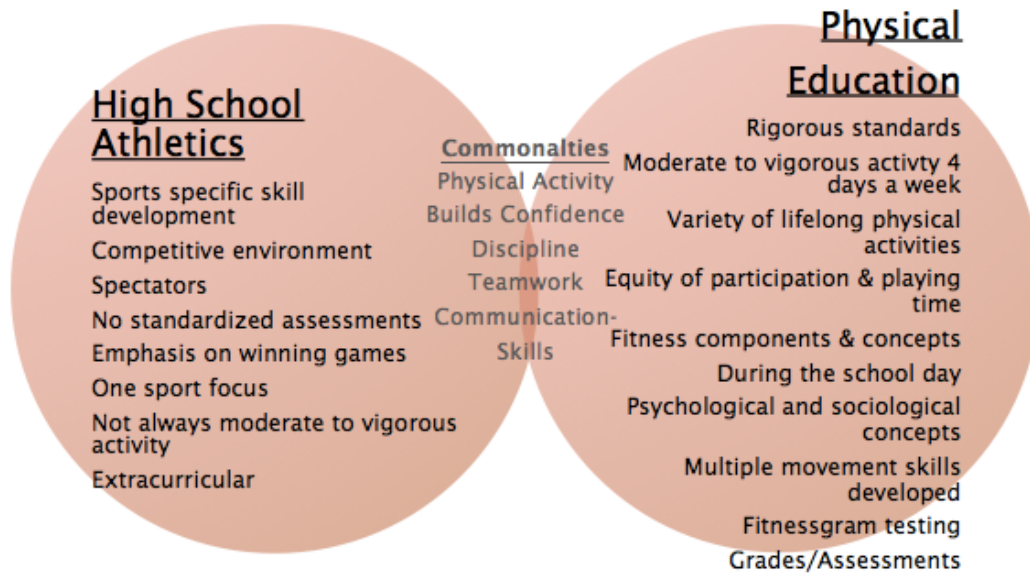


Figure 1.2 Similarities and Differences between Physical Education and High School Athletics

## Physical Education & LCAP

The Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) adopted by San Juan Unified School District outlines three priorities that must be met according to the California Education Code: Conditions of Learning, Pupil Outcomes, and Engagement. Since each of these priorities must be met, it would be in the best interest of the district to support physical education programs. These programs have a high potential to assist them in meeting LCAP goals and action steps.

Physical education supports LCAP priorities in several ways. One way is by supporting student achievement. The benefit of having physical education during the school day is that it allows students to be physically active, which stimulates the brain, causing the release of neuroprotective and growth factors in the hippocampus (Trudeau et al., 2008). These factors, such as brain derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), allow for enhanced memory, sharper thinking, and more focus and concentration (Ratey and Hagerman, 2008). Basically physical activity is like “Miracle-Gro” for the brain. Even when time for physical education reduces class time for academics, student performance in academic subjects improves (Symons et al., 1997; Trudeau and Shephard, 2008).

Another LCAP priority for SJUSD is to improve student behavior in order to reduce office referrals or home suspensions. Physical education and physical activity during the school day lead to better behavior and attentiveness in the classroom, while periods of inactivity lead to disruptive behaviors such as fidgeting and restlessness (Mahar et al., 2006; Barros et al., 2009). High quality physical education helps SJUSD achieve its LCAP goal of improving and supporting student learning to close achievement gaps and ensuring all students graduate college and career ready, by preparing students to focus and learn more in the classroom.

Physical education also helps ensure social/emotional well being for each student, another LCAP priority. Physical education standards specifically focus on social interaction, self-responsibility and group dynamics. High School Standard 3 is that students demonstrate knowledge of psychological and sociological concepts, principles, and strategies that apply to the learning and performance of physical activity. There are 19 specific standards addressing these psychological and sociological concepts in just High Schools Courses 1 and 2. Some of these include:

Course 1:

- 3.1 Accept personal responsibility to create and maintain a physically and emotionally safe and nonthreatening environment for physical activity.
- 3.2 Act independently of negative peer pressure during physical activity.
- 3.9 Recognize and evaluate the role of cooperation and positive interactions with others when participating in physical activity.

Course 2:

- 3.4 Explain and analyze the role of individual attitude, motivation, and determination in achieving personal satisfaction from challenging physical activities.
  - 3.5 Evaluate and refine personal goals to improve performance in physical activities.
  - 3.8 Identify leadership skills, perform planned leadership assignments, and assume spontaneous leadership roles.
  - 3.9 Encourage others to be supportive and inclusive of individuals of all ability levels.
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Learning these psychological and sociological concepts can benefit students in the classroom environment as well. They will be able to maintain a safe environment, avoid negative peer pressure, cooperate better, know how their attitude affects performance, refine goals, become a leader and encourage others to be supportive and inclusive of all individuals. These improved social skills along with the enhanced student learning that physical education can provide helps students achieve more and be better prepared for college and the workplace. Physical education is a critical element of a balanced education and supporting LCAP priorities. There is no question; a high quality physical education program is equally suited to meet the goals that other high quality curriculums in schools are expected to accomplish.

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