
**Considerations for The Health and Physical Education Grades 1-12
Curriculum Review**

**Submitted to: The Ministry of Education
Attention: Myra Stephen and Debra Courville
 Education Officers
 Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch**

Submitted by: Ophea (Ontario Physical and Health Education Association)



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Introduction

Ophea (Ontario Physical and Health Education Association) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting school communities through advocacy, quality programs and services, and partnership building. Ophea is led by the vision that all kids will value, participate in and make a lifelong commitment to active healthy living.

Ophea and OASPHE (Ontario Association for the Supervision of Health and Physical Education) are the Provincial Subject Associations for Health and Physical Education that work together to provide provincially coordinated leadership and support for Health and Physical Education.

Ophea and OASPHE provided input to the development of the Health and Physical Education (H&PE) curriculum that was released from 1998 to 2000. Since then, Ophea has worked in partnership with government, non-government and private sector organizations and the OASPHE membership to support the implementation of the Health and Physical Education (H&PE) curriculum particularly through the Curriculum and School Based Health Resource Centre which was established in 2001 as part of the Ontario Health Promotion Resource System and is currently funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

Through the Curriculum and School Based Health Resource Centre, Ophea is currently providing essential supports for educators to implement the Health and Physical Education Curriculum including training, consultation and resources to educators in all of Ontario's 72 school boards. This support includes a partnership with all English School Boards that was undertaken shortly after the current H&PE curriculum was released in 1998 to develop and disseminate a series of curriculum support documents (i.e. The Ophea H&PE Binders) which are still being actively used today. The Curriculum and School Based Health Resource Centre also provides various other programs and services which are available in English and French to support curriculum implementation and school based health promotion (see attached Programs and Services Catalogue or visit www.ophea.net for details).

In Fall 2007, the Ministry of Education launched a process to review the Health and Physical Education Curriculum to ensure that the curriculum remains current and relevant and is age-appropriate from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

Ophea and OASPHE have been working with the Ministry of Education to support the curriculum review process. This work includes participating in subject/division association consultation sessions and soliciting applications from current classroom teachers and subject experts and nominating candidates to participate in the Technical Analysis and Summer Writing Process. Ophea has also participated in stakeholder consultations with the Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition and the Collaborative Group for Healthy Eating and Physical Activity.

In preparation for the role that Ophea and OASPHE would play in supporting the review of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum Review, OASPHE in partnership with Ophea, conducted a survey of elementary and secondary educators (in English and French) in the fall of 2006 to gather feedback about the current H&PE curriculum.

Details regarding the strengths of the existing curriculum and areas of improvement were summarized in two documents: *What do elementary educators think of the current Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum? (October 11, 2007)* and *What do secondary*

educators think of the current Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum (October 11, 2007). These documents are attached and available for download from www.oasphe.ca.

This paper builds upon the findings of the OASPHE/Ophea Curriculum Review Survey to outline some additional considerations for the Health and Physical Education Grades 1-12 Curriculum Review based on Ophea's experience in supporting the implementation of the existing Health and Physical Education Curriculum since 1998.

Strengths and Areas of Improvement of the Existing Health and Physical Education Curriculum

Overall, the H&PE curriculum is built upon a solid philosophy which is still relevant today. As a subject area, H&PE is unique in a number of ways:

- H&PE emphasizes student participation
- H&PE provides many opportunities for student engagement and leadership
- H&PE focuses on developing important life skills – skills that are not covered in any other subject area
- H&PE includes a mandated requirement of 20 minutes for daily physical activity required during the 300 minutes of instructional time each school day (the only other subject area with a mandated number of minutes is French at 40 minutes).
- H&PE is FUN which positively contributes to the overall school environment.

Thus, in addition to having a profound impact on students, Health and Physical Education also plays a key role in achieving the Ministry of Education's vision to "energize" Ontario education.

In 2006, the Ministry of Education introduced a daily physical activity (DPA) requirement for elementary schools which requires that all elementary students participate in 20 minutes of sustained moderate to vigorous physical activity during instructional time each day. While DPA is only one part of a quality health and physical education program and only one part of the Active Participation strand, in many school communities, DPA is taking precedence over the implementation of the two other strands of the elementary H&PE curriculum, namely Fundamental Movement Skills and Healthy Living.

According to the 2007 Annual Report on Ontario's Public Schools released by People for Education¹, only 41% of elementary schools have a Health and Physical Education Specialist Teacher, but only half of these specialists are employed full time. Thus, the Health and Physical Education curriculum is implemented primarily by Generalist teachers, many of whom have limited training and experience related to Health and Physical Education. Even within schools where there is an H&PE specialist teacher, generalist teachers usually have some role to play in implementing the H&PE curriculum, particularly the Healthy Living expectations. Thus, it was not surprising that a key finding from the Ophea/OASPHE Elementary survey was that generalist teachers felt that the Healthy Living Strand required the most revision. The most commonly cited need for revision of this strand was there are "too many expectations to cover". This finding does not necessarily mean that the health expectations in the current curriculum are not relevant; rather it speaks only to volume, particularly from the perspective of a generalist teacher who must juggle implementation of the H&PE curriculum with curricula in most other subject areas. Thus, the existing H&PE

¹ http://www.peopleforeducation.com/school_survey

curriculum policy and particularly the Healthy Living strand is not being fully implemented in many school communities across the province.

The Healthy Living Strand was also cited as an area of improvement by secondary teacher respondents in the OASPHE/Ophea Curriculum Review Survey where “too many expectations” and “overlap in knowledge and skills” were the key issues. An additional challenge related to implementation of the H&PE curriculum in secondary schools is that there is only one mandatory H&PE credit required (with the majority of students taking this credit in Grade 9) which means that the majority of students are not exposed to the benefits and knowledge that can be gleaned through participation in H&PE beyond Grade 9.

Emerging Issues

Since 1998, school communities have also faced tremendous pressure to address many societal issues as well as new government priorities in areas including school safety (prevention of violence and bullying), healthy eating (vending machine guidelines, banning trans fats from schools), sexuality, sexual health (Gardasil Vaccine), anaphylaxis, Internet safety, gambling and many others. Other health issues including healthy eating, smoking prevention, and alcohol and other substance use and abuse which are currently addressed in the existing H&PE curriculum continue to be of importance to school communities.

Thus, there is clearly a need for the H&PE curriculum to include additional healthy living topics, however, as outlined in the previous section, the healthy living strand is already not being adequately addressed, primarily due to “too many expectations.

Given the myriad of other priorities in school communities (literacy, numeracy, pathways, character education) it is unlikely that significantly more time can be allotted to Health and Physical Education within the current structure of the education system. For instance, many boards’ policies indicate that the 300 instructional minutes of an elementary school day shall be allocated as follows:

- 100-120 minutes of literacy
- 60 minutes of numeracy
- 40 minutes of French
- 20 minutes Daily Physical Activity
- which leaves 60-80 minutes in each school day to cover all other curricula including the Healthy Living and Fundamental Movement Skills Strands of the H&PE Curriculum. Catholic schools must also cover Religion.

In reviewing the H&PE Curriculum, the Ministry should ensure a realistic scope of expectations and where possible consider flexible methods for how time for H&PE can be increased (e.g. direction and guidance for integration and cross-curricular programming, additional credits at secondary level, etc.)

The Ministry and other stakeholders should also consider that the Health and Physical Education Curriculum may not be the most appropriate place to address some health issues. Can stronger connections be made to other subject areas? Can some health issues be included in curricula for other subject areas? How are health related issues dealt with at a school level?

Recommendations

Ophea proposes the following recommendations:

1) Ophea believes that Health and Physical Education is an essential and necessary aspect of student achievement and the overall healthy development of children and youth. It is essential that educators be supported in order to fully implement the H&PE Curriculum.

Ophea recommends that the Ministry of Education begin to plan for the supports that will be required to fully implement the revised elementary and secondary curricula when they are released in 2009 and 2010 respectively as a parallel process to the curriculum review. Specifically, Ophea recommends that the Ministry of Education work collaboratively with Ophea and OASPHE to leverage the subject expertise, experience, relationships, and delivery channels that both organizations hold within the education sector including the Ophea Curriculum and School Based Health Resource Centre (funded by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services as part of the Ontario Health Promotion Resource System) to ensure that the support provided is provincially coordinated, of high quality and effectively delivered across the province. The curriculum itself as well as the type of support provided should take into consideration that the H&PE curriculum will be implemented, for the most part, by generalist teachers at the elementary level with little to no training, experience or even comfort to address all strands of the curriculum. Examples of supports may include:

- revisions and full French translation of the Ophea Curriculum Support Documents (i.e. H&PE Binders) which are currently being used in all English School Boards since 2000;
- access to the revised Curriculum Support Documents in both hardcopy and online formats
- funding to ensure the newly revised Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines (Ophea) are available to all school boards (currently these documents are available in English only on a subscription basis to school boards); and
- training for educators and others who will support curriculum implementation such as public health. A key focus of this support will be on strategies to integrate H&PE expectations into other subject areas.

2) Ophea believes that it is essential to strengthen the connection between the Health and Physical Education Curriculum and the government's broader Healthy Schools mandate.

While it may not be feasible for the curriculum itself to address all health issues equally (or at all) many issues may be suited (and in many cases better suited) to be addressed within the broader context of a Healthy School. According to the *Foundations for a Healthy School* framework released by the Ministry of Education in Spring 2007, Healthy Schools not only include high quality instruction and programs (i.e. consistent with the H&PE curriculum) but also supportive physical environments, supportive social environments and community partnerships. Using the flexible framework outlined in the *Foundations for a Healthy School* framework, school communities can set their own priorities and implement strategies to achieve these priorities. Thus, Healthy Schools is an important lens through which revisions to the H&PE Curriculum can be made. Using this lens, clear linkages can also be made to the Ministry's vision to energize education and create a stronger and healthier Ontario.

3) The Ministry of Education should ensure that linkages are made to other federal and provincial government initiatives and strategies to help educators and other stakeholders understand how these priorities relate to the “core business of schools”, namely curriculum implementation, so that they can be more effectively implemented in schools.

Examples of linkages that should be made include: Healthy Schools, Safe Schools, Smoke Free Ontario, the revised Public Health Standards and subsequent Guidance Document for School Health, the Healthy Eating and Active Living Strategy (HEAL Strategy), Active 2010, Canada’s Food Guide, and Canada’s Physical Activity Guide for Children and Youth. Stronger connections should also be made between the H&PE curriculum and the Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines (available through Ophea).

Summary

Ophea believes that the release of a renewed Health and Physical Education Curriculum for Grades 1-12 will help to ensure that all kids will value, participate in and make a lifelong commitment to active healthy living.

Ophea wishes to thank the Ministry of Education for the opportunity to provide feedback during the H&PE Curriculum Review Process. Ophea is looking forward to continuing to work with the Ministry of Education, the subject/division association partners, and other stakeholders to continue to support the process for review and ultimately implementation of the renewed H&PE Curriculum for Grades 1-12.

Should you have any further questions or require additional information please do not hesitate to contact Jennifer Cowie Bonne, Director of Marketing and Development at (416) 426-7219 or jenncb@ophea.org.