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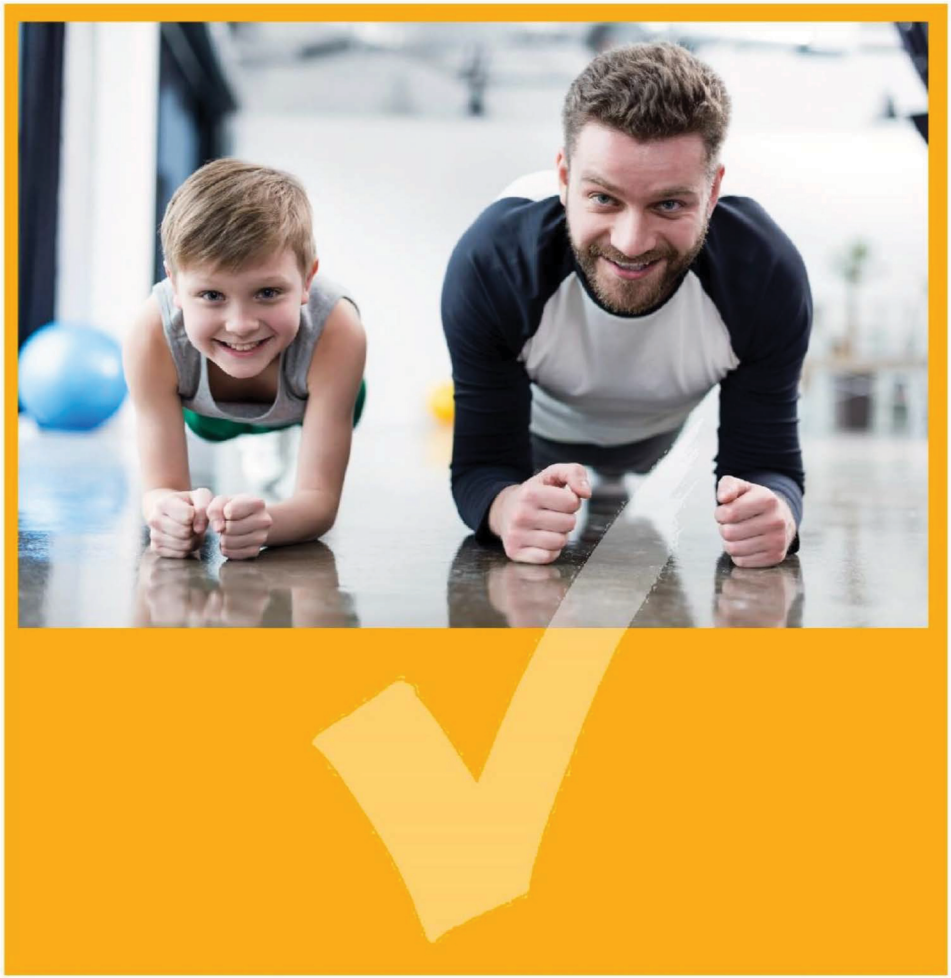
Getting to Know Your Child's PE Program:

A Parent's Guide



Getting to Know Your Child's Physical Education Program

SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators is committed to putting all children on the path to health literacy and physical literacy through effective health and physical education programs. Does the physical education program in your child's school help students attain the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for leading healthy and active lives?

SHAPE America encourages you to familiarize yourself with your child's physical education program by using the table of questions starting on p. 4 to begin a collaborative conversation with your child's physical education teacher. If you prefer, you can look up the answers to these questions on the internet by visiting the school district or school's website.

The table is organized by questions to ask and why the questions are important to ask. In the column titled "Why It's Important to Ask," you will find resources to help you better understand effective physical education and the importance of the questions. The table includes a section at the end for taking notes.

During the collaborative meeting, you can ask follow-up questions and convey your willingness to support the physical education program and the teacher's goals for the program.

Schools play a key role in equipping students of all ages with the knowledge, attitudes and skills they need to live healthy, active lives. As a parent, you have a strong voice in ensuring that educators are being supported in their efforts to provide students with the learning experiences they need to make healthy decisions.

For questions or comments, e-mail programming@shapeamerica.org.

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About SHAPE America
SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators is the national organization that serves as the voice for 200,000+ health and physical education professionals across the nation. Since its founding in 1885, the organization has defined excellence in physical education, and our National Standards for K-12 Physical Education serve as the foundation for well-designed physical education programs across the country. We provide programs, resources and advocacy that support an inclusive, active, kinder, and healthier school culture and champion health and physical educators at every level, from preschool to university graduate programs. Our extensive community includes members, advocates and supporters, as well as 51 state affiliate organizations (including the District of Columbia). Together we are working, in and out of schools to prepare every child to lead a healthy, physically active life. For more information, visit shapeamerica.org.

About National PTA
National PTA® comprises millions of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of family engagement in schools. PTA is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit association that prides itself on being a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for public education. Membership in PTA is open to anyone who wants to be involved and make a difference for the education, health and welfare of children and youth. For more information, visit PTA.org.

Questions	Why It's Important to Ask
1. Is physical education taught by a certified teacher with a degree in physical education?	It's important to ask these questions to ascertain whether the school values physical education as part of a well-rounded education. Students should have physical education classes regularly, and each class should be taught by a certified physical education teacher with a degree in physical education. Certified physical education teachers have had extensive education in creating a safe physical and emotional environment in which to engage all students in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity while embedding meaningful content within the activity. Often, physical education class sizes are larger than those of other subject areas. Physical education classes that are larger than those of other subject areas can compromise students' learning and safety. To learn more, check out the Policy and Environment section of SHAPE America's The Essential Components of Physical Education.
2. Do students receive formal instruction in physical education that meets one or both of these guidelines? a. A minimum of 150 minutes per week (for elementary school students) and 225 minutes per week (for middle school and high school students. b. At least three class periods per week across the entire school year for all grades.	
3. Is the physical education class size similar to that of other content areas, to ensure safe, effective instruction?	
4. Do administrators conduct regular observations and evaluation s of the physical education program and teacher performance?	School administrators should evaluate all teachers, including physical educators, to ensure effective teaching. Because administrators might not be familiar with current physical education pedagogy and what effective physical education looks like, share SHAPE America's 20 Indicators of Effective Physical Education Instruction with your school's principal or assistant principal to help him or her provide meaningful feedback to the physical education teacher. This document can supplement what the administrator already knows and can fill in any gaps about what to expect from today's physical education teachers.

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Questions	Why It's Important to Ask
5. Does the school offer a sequential, standards-based curriculum for physical education?	Curriculum — one of the four Essential Components of Physical Education (SHAPE America, 2015) — is a written plan that details how students will attain appropriate learning outcomes and meet state, local or national standards. Physical education teachers should be using a written curriculum that is aligned with national or state standards and that is updated periodically. Learn more about curriculum in physical education here.
6. Does the physical education program include regular assessments of student learning that are based on standards and meaningful content objectives?	Assessment is a way to gather information on student progress toward learning goals and objectives. Teachers should conduct assessments to measure student progress in meeting state and/or national standards. That is best practice in all subject areas, including physical education. Learn more about student assessment here.
7. Does the program provide maximum participation for every student (e.g., inclusion, no elimination games, all students active at once, developmentally appropriate activities)?	One of the goals for every physical education class is for students to be moderately to vigorously active for at least 50 percent of class time. Physical education teachers should not have students standing around or listening to a lecture. However, neither should students run relay races, or play dodgeball or other elimination-type games in physical education class, as they promote bullying and do not keep students moderately to vigorously active for 50 percent of class time. Instead, students should have as many opportunities to practice the skills being taught as class time allows. If your child's physical education teacher allows students to play dodgeball in class, share with him or her SHAPE America's position statement, Dodgeball Is Not an Appropriate Physical Education Activity.

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8. Does the physical education teacher have and practice a method for evaluating the physical education program?	Program evaluation and improvement is important for ensuring that curricular goals and student needs are being met. Physical education teachers should evaluate their programs to make necessary adjustments for improving effectiveness and staying current with best practices in the field. SHAPE America's Physical Education Program Checklist is a great place to start for teachers, parents and administrator alike.
9. How are students with disabilities included in your physical education program?	Students with disabilities have a right under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 to participate in meaningful physical education in the least-restrictive environment. That means all students must be given the opportunity to learn in physical education class, with appropriate adaptations and modifications provided when needed. The physical education teacher should collaborate with the school's special education staff to provide students with disabilities with the best learning environment and strategies for ensuring their success. For more information, see SHAPE America's Answering Frequently Asked Questions About Adapted Physical Education.
10. Does the school offer recess?	Recess isn't a physical educator's direct responsibility, but it does provide an opportunity for extending students' learning by giving them physical activity time to practice the skills taught in physical education. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as SHAPE America, support offering recess as an important part of the school day for all K-12 students. All students should receive at least 20 minutes of recess daily. (Yes, even high schoolers!) SHAPE America's Strategies for Recess is a great tool for learning about how recess bolsters performance in the classroom.

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Questions	Why It's Important to Ask
11. Do students sometimes have to miss physical education to complete classwork or because a student misbehaved?	Students should not lose physical education and physical activity opportunities in favor of spending more time on classwork or to make up assignments. Also, physical activity — or denial of physical activity — should not be used as punishment. Read SHAPE America's position statement on Using Physical Activity as Punishment for details on why this is poor practice. Please share the position statement with your child's physical education teacher or administrators if you feel that this is an issue at your child's school.
12. Is physical activity — or the withholding of physical activity — used as a negative consequence when students misbehave?	
13. Are social and emotional learning skills integrated into the health and physical education classroom?	Social and emotional learning (SEL) has become a critical component of educating today's youth. In school districts across the country, SEL is no longer just a classroom lesson but a system-wide framework involving a coordinated approach in classrooms, schools, communities, and family units. Health and physical educators are on the front lines of the SEL movement — and can maximize their role by teaching free lessons, activities, and community-building ideas that teach children how to cope with stress, bullying, and societal pressures.
Notes:	

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