

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 has redefined expectations for physical education in K-12 schools. While physical education was not included as a core academic subject in its predecessor, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the ESSA formally recognizes physical education as an essential component of a “well-rounded education.” This significant conceptual shift reinforces the potential contribution of physical education in addressing critical societal challenges such as childhood obesity, sedentary lifestyles, and physical literacy among K-12 learners (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018; Society of Health and Physical Educators [SHAPE America], 2016).

As a recognized contributor to a well-rounded education, physical education now shares an increased expectation for demonstrating student learning with other comparable subject areas at both state and local levels. Accordingly, supporting evidence of student learning in physical education is needed for stakeholders to:

- Achieve a shared vision for school physical education including its future direction.
- Identify program strengths and needs as a basis for continuous program improvement.
- Advocate for physical education programming.

Furthermore, ESSA funding requires evidence of student learning, including Title I (low-income schools), Title II (professional development), and Title IV (student support and academic enrichment) (SHAPE America, 2016). The need for evidence makes implementation of state-level accountability systems in physical education vital.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to describe the status of state-level accountability systems for student learning in physical education. The findings provide policymakers and school leaders with valuable information regarding the development and implementation of state-level physical education accountability systems to inform decision-making in policy, standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

METHOD

Researchers employed a mixed-method design (Bowen, 2009). The data sources consisted of survey results collected across two phases and publicly accessible documents related to school policy. In Phase 1, a web-based survey was administered to representatives from 50 states and the District of Columbia. A total of 43 state representatives completed the web-based survey, and four states representatives responded to an email. One state representative answered an email noting that the state had an accountability system but declined to participate in the survey.

For the states that completed the survey and reported having a state-level accountability system in place, further analyses were conducted on the related documents (i.e., policy and legislation) that were uploaded into their survey responses. A report published by SHAPE America (2016) was also analyzed to acquire information regarding the status of physical education for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In Phase 2, researchers conducted a follow-up survey with representatives from the states with an accountability system. The data were analyzed and summarized descriptively.

RESULTS

Among the 48 states that responded to the survey or the email, a total of eleven states indicated that there was an accountability system to measure student outcomes. However, one of the eleven states declined to participate in the survey. Of the ten states which had an accountability system and completed the survey, seven measured fitness outcomes, two measured multiple content standards, and one assessed cognitive outcomes. The results across both phases of the study supported that there were four critical elements necessary for robust accountability systems: (1) legislation/policy to mandate implementation of the system, (2) utilization of online system to facilitate data collection and analysis, (3) data monitoring processes to ensure validity and reliability, and (4) data dissemination/evaluation strategies to inform key stakeholders of current status and future directions. Furthermore, school leaders and other key stakeholders must work together to address the fundamental elements of

school policy and the environment in physical education (e.g., required subject area, required minutes per week, mandatory teacher certification, and appropriate class sizes). Without these foundations, maximum student learning cannot be expected. Additionally, factors such as stakeholder support and shared decision-making, continuing professional development for school personnel, school-university partnership and shared expertise, and advocacy efforts across multiple audiences and platforms are vital to facilitate the implementation and sustainment of systems.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the limited number of states with physical education accountability systems in place, there is a need for further development in this area. Rink (2016) and van der Mars (2018) cautioned, however, that the field cannot wait for policymakers to prompt a wide-spread systemic change in physical education because it is unlikely ever to represent an immediate priority. Therefore, all key stakeholders in physical education need to take the initiative in developing state and local systems for accountability that promote student learning. It is also important to recognize that there is no single best approach to develop an effective accountability system. Decision-makers and physical education experts can collaboratively determine a course of action that best meets the needs of their teachers, students, families, and school-community stakeholders.