

Mandatory Physical Education Classes

An Association poll conducted on this question produced nearly unanimous agreement that good physical education programs are beneficial to students. In spite of this feeling, only a small minority of the respondents favored the passage of this bill at this time. Several reasons were given.

- By far the most common objection was that it would obviously be an unfunded mandate as currently presented. Most of the respondents, a clear majority, felt that it would be very difficult, if not impossible to institute a new program under the present fiscal conditions in their district.
- Many systems have eliminated physical education positions due to local fiscal decisions. At the very least this would require a sufficient lead-in time to allow for replacement of these people. (Given recent school fiscal history, however, anyone who foresees any more liberal financing for schools is an optimist indeed. In all probability, any mandate promulgated now without funding is very unlikely to be implemented on any wide scale. A current bill requiring plant improvements will probably suffer the same fate, since it too has no funding provisions, while requiring a lot of expensive work.)
- Some doubted the availability of enough qualified personnel to institute the scope of program envisioned by the legislative bill.
- One respondent noted that even two or three hours of physical education would be competing with the 4-5 hours per day that students spend on passive pursuits, notably TV watching and electronic games. This caused this respondent to wonder if the proposed program would really make a difference.

In sum, the responses indicated a willingness to listen to further details about the proposal, but it was obvious that the main concerns were cost and personnel. If the state made some realistic, long-term provision to support the cost of the program, it would no doubt be well received. It should be noted that the cost would be considerable, might involve lengthening the school day, and could not be met merely by having seed money for a year or two. The present state of local school finance makes a seed money grant very unlikely to produce permanent change.