

There is an alarming statewide and national trend to downsize or eliminate physical education classes as requirements or electives at both the elementary and secondary levels in our public schools. Physical Education is no longer part of the state or graduation standards. This is being done despite the strong recommendations to the contrary. The Surgeon General of the United States, the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the American College of Sports Medicine are just a few calling for daily physical education requirements in our schools. The individual and national ramifications of the sedentary lifestyle are staggering:

- 15-25% of today's children are obese (30% overweight) [Giel 1988]
- 33% of children aged 6-11 is fat [Center for Adolescent Obesity at Univ. of Calif]
- 86% of overweight 10-13 yr olds become overweight adults [American Journal of Public Health] The conclusion of the Journal of the American Medical Association's (JAMA) study on the expected loss of years of life due to overweight is that "Obesity appears to lessen life expectancy markedly, especially among younger adults." (22% or 13 years) [JAMA Jan 8, 2003]
- Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) is an annual \$100+ billion adult problem in the US [1985 figures]
- 90% of adults 18-64 do not exercise with enough intensity, duration, or frequency to achieve any benefit. [National Counsel on Youth Fitness and Sports 1987]
- 12% of all deaths in the US result from lack of regular physical activity. [Steven Blair, Journal of the American Medical Association, Feb 1, 1995]
- 62% of elementary children have at least one CHD/CAD risk factor and 21% had three or more. [MAHPERD newsletter 1997]

Some of the benefits listed by the Surgeon General include:

- reduced risk of premature death from heart disease
- reduced risk of developing diabetes
- reduced risk of high blood pressure
- reduced risk of developing colon cancer
- reduces feelings of depression and anxiety
- helps weight control
- promotes psychological well being

It has been shown in at least two studies that when given free time (recess) elementary age students will NOT be active enough to gain any cardiovascular benefit. With this in mind what is the remedy for this health concern? As the Surgeon General's report states, "School based interventions have been shown to be successful in increasing physical activity levels. With evidence that success in this arena is possible, *every effort should be made to encourage schools to require daily physical education in each grade* (italics added) and promote physical activities that can be enjoyed throughout life." The American Academy of Pediatrics, MAHPERD, and the Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics are recommending "that all schools in Minnesota immediately explore strategies to increase physical activity among students with the eventual *goal of participation in daily physical activity with a Physical Education Specialist.*"