

Let's Get

Physical
Education

By Allison Mowatt



Physical education in the school system has come a long way, and students actually look forward to their gym classes now instead of thinking of any excuse to go to the nurse's office. Our local schools are recognizing the importance of making sure students are not just active in class, but enjoy activity enough to continue a physically fit way of life into their adult years.

According to Andrew Cerra, Physical Education Teacher at Wallenpaupack Area High School, more options are presented that allow the students to tailor their activities to their likes and needs. The district expanded the curriculum, which has been evolving over the past fifteen to twenty years to present students with more options that include lifetime activities such as biking, golf, kayaking, canoeing, weightlifting, and aerobic activities. "Teachers have more resources available to them, and the administration has given us the tools we need to implement new programs and purchase new equipment," he said.

Some of the new additions and programs include a fitness center, the fit stat program, a wellness program for juniors, the field turf, and various programs modeled after the P90X. The fitness center includes a brand new cardiovascular room with treadmills, elliptical machines, stair climbers, free weights, and power lifting equipment.

The fit stat, an online fitness and physical activity assessment, allows parents to see how their child is progressing in the realm of physical fitness. The wellness program was implemented about twenty years ago and measures cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar to identify any potential health problems.

The field turf is an improved version of the Astro Turf that was first used in the 1960s. It is artificial grass made of synthetic fiber that keeps the surface dry. This gives students more time outside even if the weather is not favorable. The P90X programs are an extreme training system that includes twelve different workouts all designed to help transform or change the body into a leaner build. It can be modified to meet the different types of students whose levels of fitness can be at various stages.

Although a greater emphasis is placed on lifetime sports and wellness activities now, traditional team sports are still offered, such as softball, lacrosse, volleyball, and basketball. A neighboring school district is also focusing more on activities and sports students can easily continue after they graduate and can implement into their daily lives. According to Wayne Highlands School District Athletic Director Chuck Alexander, the physical education program has changed dramatically over the years. As recently as six years ago, the focus was on playing games and just having fun with sports like football, soccer, basketball, and volleyball. "Now students get to pick one of three different tracks, which are more lifetime activity oriented," explained Mr. Alexander, who was also a high school Physical Education Teacher for eighteen years. Some of these activities include table tennis, bowling, the fitness room, weight room, yoga, and stretching. "The idea is to get the students interested and excited about participating in recreational activities they will want to continue for the rest of their lives," said Mr. Alexander. Another positive aspect is that the students get a choice and are not forced to play a game or sport they don't want to. There is more flexibility in this new system as well.

Funds received from a grant went toward the new fitness room and allowed for the purchase of more physical education equipment, which was distributed throughout the entire district. With so many unique and fun choices in gym class today, students may forget they are even in school!

Why is Physical Activity so Important Anyway?

Regular physical activity has many benefits, such as preventing chronic health conditions, promoting weight loss, and ensuring better sleep patterns.

- 1} Improves Mood**
Physical activity stimulates various brain chemicals that may leave you feeling happier and more relaxed than you were before you worked out. Regular exercise also improves self-confidence and overall self-esteem since it can make you look and feel better. It has also been known to decrease symptoms of depression and fatigue.
- 2} Combat Chronic Diseases**
Regular physical activity can help battle many medical conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, certain types of cancer, osteoporosis, and high cholesterol.
- 3} Manage Your Weight**
One of the main reasons people exercise on a regular basis is so they can manage their weight. Engaging in physical activity burns calories, and the slightest change in your routine can be beneficial. You can walk up the stairs instead of taking the elevator, take a walk after school, play a school sport, or set aside time after dinner to get some exercise instead of watching television or sitting at the computer.
- 4} Boost Your Energy Level**
Physical activity delivers oxygen and nutrients to the tissues, which gives you an energy boost. In addition, it helps the entire cardiovascular system work more efficiently.
- 5} Better Sleep Patterns**
Having the proper amount of rest can improve concentration, productivity, and mood. Being active can help you fall asleep faster and deepen your sleep. Make sure you don't exercise too close to bedtime because you may be too energized to fall asleep. You need the right amount of sleep to stay alert in class and retain the information.