
A Strong and Healthy Start: Safety and Healthy Guidance for Vermont Schools FAQ 7: Physical Education

The Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) has released joint guidance with the Vermont Department of Health on safely reopening schools. This document, [A Strong and Healthy Start: Safety and Health Guidance for Vermont Schools](#) (referred to as Health and Safety guidance going forward) provides health guidance to school administrators and school personnel as they plan and implement the reopening of schools for the 2020-21 School Year in the context of COVID-19.

This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document responds to follow up questions from physical educators and is intended to clarify and expand on the guidance.

Q1: Have the Education Quality Standards changed for physical education?

No, they have not changed. The [Education Quality Standards \(EQS\)](#) Rule 2120.5 states, “Each school shall enable students to engage annually in rigorous, relevant and comprehensive learning opportunities that allows them to demonstrate proficiency in health and physical education.” How Supervisory unions and districts (SU/SDs) provide students the opportunity to become proficient in physical education depends on the learning model being used. School leaders and physical educators need to collaborate with school staff to determine the best ways to embed physical activity and physical education instruction into the school schedule to support the wellness and success of all students.

Q2: How can physical education instruction be embedded into various learning models?

Studies have identified a [significant relationship](#) between physical activity and academic achievement. [The American Academy of Pediatrics](#) states that it is “critical to maintain a balanced curriculum with continued physical education and other learning experiences rather than an exclusive emphasis on core subject areas.” [Effective physical education programs](#) provide students with the opportunity to learn and practice the [social and emotional skills](#) and behaviors that help them succeed in life. Additionally, educating students on maintaining community well-being through interdisciplinary strategies for determining objective and attainable personal or community health goals via [inquiry and research](#) can support the attainment of physical education proficiencies (e.g., identifying a real-life health concern,

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collecting data on that concern, and developing a product or campaign that spreads awareness of or offers a solution to that concern).

Q3: What types of equipment can be used for physical education instruction?

[No-equipment games and activities](#) in physical education need to be considered when planning physical education instruction. According to [SHAPE America's considerations for reopening schools](#), if physical educators use equipment for instruction, it needs to be non-porous and easily and effectively sanitized between uses in accordance with the Vermont [Health and Safety guidance](#).

Students should be assigned their own piece of equipment for a class period and the teacher should have extra materials available in case a piece of equipment being use by a student becomes dirty or unsanitary during a lesson or activity. Properly clean and disinfect equipment between classes. If there is not equitable access to equipment for all students or if equipment cannot be properly cleaned and disinfected between classes, avoid the use of equipment altogether.

Q4: Can recess or classroom physical activity breaks be used as a substitute for physical education?

No, activity breaks cannot be used as a substitute for physical education. While [activity breaks](#) benefit student productivity and provide them with opportunities to develop creativity and social skills, they cannot be used as a substitute for physical education. The [EOS](#) Rule 2120.5 states, "Physical activity may include recess and movement built into the curriculum but does not replace physical education classes." This means that recess cannot be a substitute for physical education instruction.

Q5: Can the gymnasium be used as a physical education classroom as long as health and safety guidelines are followed?

Gymnasiums cannot be used for in-person physical education instruction while schools are operating in Step II. When schools are open for in-person instruction with enhanced physical distancing measures (Step II), communal spaces such as gymnasiums and cafeterias should be closed for their intended use (e.g., physical activity, recess, before- and after-school events and sports programs); these spaces, however, may be used as an extension of the classroom to allow for physical distancing.

When schools are open for in-person instruction with distancing measures (Step III), gymnasiums may be used for their intended purposes in smaller groups, staggering use, and for physical education instruction that involves minimal physical exertion (for example, yoga or elements of dance (e.g., repetition and rhythm)) and that is aligned with health and safety guidelines. If multiple classes will use the space, stagger use with at least one hour between use

by different groups. **Even in Step III, it is strongly preferred to take students outside whenever possible, where they can be more active in a safer environment.**

Q6: If the gymnasium is not available, how can physical education teachers safely deliver instruction?

When gymnasiums are not available, outdoor spaces should be used to deliver physical education whenever possible when schools are open for in-person instruction with enhanced physical distancing measures (Step II). Outdoor physical education provides students with the opportunity to participate in a well-rounded curriculum and flexible learning pathways. If outdoor spaces cannot be accessed for physical education (e.g., school lacks adequate outdoor spaces, inclement weather conditions, etc.), classroom spaces or accessible community recreation spaces (e.g., parks, recreation fields, bike paths, etc.) should be used. When schools are open for in-person instruction with distancing measures (Step III), gymnasiums may be used for their intended purposes in smaller groups, staggering use, and cleaning and disinfecting between uses.

Q7: Why are there different guidelines for use of equipment, activities and distancing for physical education and athletic programs?

The [Safety and Health Guidance for Vermont Schools](#) is the primary guidance for reopening schools for all students. Indoor guidance in the [Fall Sports Program for 2020 – 2021 School Year](#) was developed primarily for Vermont’s one fall indoor sport, volleyball. Volleyball may hold team practice sessions limited to no and low contact physical conditioning and skill building drills. Indoor inter-squad scrimmages within your school program are allowed only if all participants (players and coaches) are wearing cloth facing coverings at all times while play is occurring. Health guidance must be adhered to when the volleyball team uses the gymnasium.

Q8: Will the Vermont Physical Education Assessment (VTPEA) be administered in the Spring of 2021?

We are not sure yet. The AOE will be communicating general updates regarding state assessments in the near term and on an ongoing basis as we work with our federal counterparts.

Q9: Can physical educators be required to work outside of their contracted responsibilities?

The Agency of Education requires teachers to be endorsed in the areas they are assigned to teach but does not make decisions re: local work assignments or contractual expectations.