**PEDAGOGY**

# Formulating Independent School K–12 Quality Physical Education Program Guidelines

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to formulate Tennessee independent school K–12 quality physical education program guidelines. A panel of 18 physical education representatives from Tennessee independent schools K–12 participated in a three-phase Delphi study and completed three opinionnaires via e-mail. In Phase One, Opinionnaire One solicited panel member opinions pertaining to research-based physical education issues retrieved from a review of literature and panel-generated issues. In Phase Two, Opinionnaire Two panel members ranked 48 trend statements for desirability and feasibility. In Phase Three, Opinionnaire Three panel members ranked the statistically strongest physical education recommendations in order of importance to formulate nine guidelines. The study concluded that "Incorporate health, wellness, and fitness components into the physical education class" was ranked as the number one Tennessee independent school K–12 quality physical education program guideline.*

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Extensive research has been conducted within public schools investigating the direction and quality of physical education programs. University and college physical education programs have also been extensively studied. However, there has been a dearth of studies investigating physical education program issues within independent schools K–12.

Independent schools are classified under the heading of private schools (Council for American Private Education [CAPE], 2007) and are considered a branch of private education. The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS, 2008) recognizes each independent school as self-determining in mission and in program, as free from government control, and as governed by independent boards. In the 2006–2007 academic school year, 1,380 NAIS independent member/nonmember schools existed with total enrollment reaching 646,325 (NAIS, 2008). An additional 7% increase in enrollment in private schools is predicted between 2008 and 2013 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

As independent school education moves forward in the new millennium, a growing responsibility for school policy makers is to meet the increasing demands of its students, students' parents, alumni, and board members. To meet consumer demands requires internal evaluation and planning. Implementing the correct planning process can yield significant findings into future independent school physical education issues and concerns. Planning can (a) provide information for decision making, (b) broaden one's time horizons, (c) ensure exploration of possibilities and alternatives, and (d) enable the planning of courses of action (Chai, 1977; Good, 1998; Muntzing, 1987; Thueson, 1985).

Physical education programs continue to be questioned at all levels and grades (Lee, 2002). Many physical education programs have low academic status among parents and non-physical education faculty, lack direction, and have failed in providing students with quality physical education experiences (Lee, 2002). For independent schools to attract tuition-paying families who desire a quality education experience and to assist independent schools in fulfilling their academic mission and vision, additional research is warranted that investigates independent school K–12 quality physical education programs.

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) is a professional association that has developed standards

and practices for physical education and sport. Many independent schools adhere to the national standards for physical education and sport. Implementing proactive research that adopts a participatory planning process can be productive in meeting the school's goals (Stone, 2000). Pierce (1997) recognizes the importance of vision toward meeting the purpose of physical education and explains that as a profession, physical educators often define the purpose but fail in providing a vision to meet the purpose.

For accurate examination of independent school physical education, selecting physical education representatives to participate in the planning process is necessary if future issues and concerns of the discipline are to be identified (Leinster, 2003). According to Martin (2003), successful planning that addresses school physical education issues and provides an environment conducive for student learning is the responsibility of the physical educator. Therefore, independent school physical educators should be recognized as the centerpiece for curriculum change and given the support and opportunities to initiate physical education program reform (Lee, 2002). Boone (1994) supported this dynamic approach: "The future of physical education lies within the profession itself, or more specifically, in the hands of the physical educators" (p. 3).

Guidelines can provide physical educators with a statement or other indications of policy or procedure by which to determine a course of action. For the purpose of this study, formulating quality physical education program guidelines generated from a panel of Tennessee independent school K–12 physical education representatives may provide school physical education policy makers with valuable information. Quality physical education program guidelines may assist in meeting family's expectations for high quality education, increase the educational value of physical education, and further develop the quality of Tennessee independent school K–12 physical education programs.

## Research Questions

To formulate Tennessee independent school K–12 quality physical education program guidelines, independent school physical education representatives' opinions regarding four current research-based physical education issues retrieved from a review of physical education literature and physical education issues generated by independent school physical education representatives are required.

The study was directed by three main research questions:

1. What are panel members' opinions pertaining to four current research-based physical education issues and panel-generated issues?

2. How will panel members rank physical education trend statements for desirability and feasibility?

3. How will panel members rank the statistically strongest physical education recommendations to formulate Tennessee independent school K–12 quality physical education program guidelines?

## Methods

### Study Procedures

The Tennessee Association of Independent Schools comprised 56 independent member schools. The investigator contacted by telephone the Associate Director of the Tennessee Association of Independent Schools (TAIS) and discussed the proposed study. Following the telephone conversation the investigator sent the Associate Director an e-mail explaining the purpose of and procedures for the study.

The investigator made telephone calls to all 56 Tennessee K–12 Heads of School. The purpose of the study was explained and school physical education representative contact information was requested. A follow-up e-mail was then sent to each Head of School containing the physical education contact permission form, which requested the name and contact information of their school's physical education representative. Heads of School were asked to return, via fax, the name, or names, of their physical education representative who could serve on a statewide panel of physical education representatives.

### Panel Members

To qualify as a panel member each independent school physical education representative had to meet the following study criteria:

- employed to teach, or have taught, or is responsible for decisions regarding independent school physical education/physical activity;

- cognizant of issues relating to physical education/physical activity and can provide opinions that may assist in directing Tennessee independent school physical education programs;
- willing to participate as a physical education representative, via e-mail, on a Tennessee independent school physical education panel; and
- have access to a computer at work and/or at home and be familiar and comfortable with corresponding using e-mail.

Of the 35 independent school physical education representatives contacted via e-mail, 22 returned the study forms and consented to serve as physical education representatives on the statewide panel.

**Demographic Survey**

The main purpose of the demographic survey was to ascertain panel members' best described independent school employment position and years of experience teaching physical education or related activities in independent schools. The 22-member panel of physical education representatives was diverse in independent school physical education occupation and experienced in teaching physical education or related activities. The 22-member panel consisted of three physical education chairpersons, one of whom coached; five athletic directors, four of whom coached; 12 physical education teachers, nine of whom coached; and two teachers who coached. No panel members best described their position as athletic coach. Of the 22-member panel, one panel member had less than 5 years of experience, six had 6 to 10 years of experience, and the remaining 15 panel members had 11 or more years of experience. Out of the 22-member panel, eight panel members (36%) were female and 14 panel members (64%) were male.

**Delphi Technique**

One research technique that is considered visionary and that utilizes expert opinion is the Delphi technique. The Delphi is a study technique that provides an opportunity for a group of experts to express their opinions regarding current and future events; "where knowledge is absent, as it may well be in forecasting the future, the Delphi technique seeks to elicit the 'opinion' of several experts and to reach a consensus about some future probability" (Fischer, 1978, p. 64). The Delphi technique implemented for this study comprised

three phases and three opinionnaires, one opinionnaire for each phase.

**Opinionnaire One**

Opinionnaire One contained four current physical education issues with accompanying response requests retrieved from a review of physical education literature and one additional open-ended issue question and response request. The four issues addressed are (I) image of the profession; (II) quality of the curriculum; (III) quality of instruction; and (IV) amount of physical activity. A brief typed explanation of each issue was provided for all panel members. An open-ended issue question was included in the e-mail to encourage panel members to explore and list one further issue that they considered important for independent school physical education programs. The four issues with their accompanying response requests and one open-ended issue question and its response request are listed below.

**Research-based issue I: Image of the profession.** Despite the efforts of many physical education teachers who provide quality physical education programs, the image of the profession has fallen under scrutiny. To achieve a positive image "physical educators should spend extra effort and time to establish credibility" (Kimiecik, Demas, & Demas, 1994).

*Response to issue I: In your opinion, explain what actions can be taken to improve the image of Tennessee independent school physical education programs.*

**Research-based issue II: Benefits of the curriculum.** Physical education has come under investigation from policy makers and administrators who question the benefits of the physical education curriculum. "With financial problems and budget constraints, policy makers are often forced to assess the value of physical education relative to other school subjects and this is often based on their perception of the benefits of physical education" (Landers, Alderman, & Rogers, 2003).

*Response to issue II: In your opinion, explain what actions can be taken regarding Tennessee independent school physical education curriculum.*

**Research-based issue III: Quality of instruction.** The school setting, accompanied with quality instruction, provides the primary

environment to promote physical education and physical activity. "Physical educators can nurture positive lifestyle habits among their students by being a role model, by how they interact with students, by knowing their students, and by taking a proactive approach" (Stelzer, 2005).

*Response to issue III: In your opinion, explain what actions can be taken to improve the quality of Tennessee independent school physical education instruction.*

**Research-based issue IV: Amount of physical activity.** Physical education programs can provide school children with opportunities to be physically active. Participating in regular physical activity can provide young people with physical and mental health benefits; however, "… physical educators are cited for not providing students with enough health-related physical activity" (Lee, 2004).

*Response to Issue IV: In your opinion, explain what actions Tennessee independent school physical education programs can take to promote student physical activity.*

**Open-ended issue question.** Having responded to the four prior issues, in your opinion, identify one additional physical education issue that you believe is important for Tennessee independent school quality physical education programs.

*Response to Issue: What actions can Tennessee independent school physical education programs take to address the issue?*

Panel members responded to the above issues by typing in their own opinions and returned all issue responses via e-mail to the investigator.

**Opinionnaire Two**

Opinions from Opinionnaire One were processed qualitatively by the investigator and categorized according to response similarities (Dalkey, 1967). The Delphi technique recognizes within the collection process opinions that appear most frequently (Good, 1998). All opinions from Opinionnaire One that shared similarities were written as *trend statements*, a term used for grouping statements together that share similarities from a panel of experts (Good, 1998), to avoid redundancy and overlap of responses (Brister, 2007).

Opinionnaire Two, contained all generated trend statements. Opinionnaire Two was sent via e-mail to the panel members. Panel members were instructed to rank each trend statement separately

for trend statement desirability and trend statement feasibility using the following 5-point Likert scale: (1) *very undesirable and very low feasibility*, (2) *undesirable and low feasibility*, (3) *desirable and feasible*, (4) *high desirability and high feasibility*, or (5) *very high desirability and very high feasibility*. Panel members e-mailed Opinionnaire Two, containing their trend statement rankings, back to the investigator.

**Establishing Trend Statement Recommendations**

Responses to Opinionnaire Two were statistically analyzed using means and standard deviations. To qualify as a trend statement recommendation, two statistical criteria were implemented. First, since 3 was considered to be average, *desirable and feasible*, on the 5-point Likert scale, each trend statement that attained both a desirability and feasibility mean score of 3.5 or higher qualified as trend statement recommendations (Good, 1998). An independent t-test comparison between all trend statement desirability mean scores and all trend statement feasibility mean scores was calculated to discover if the means of the two groups were statistically different from each other at the $p < .0001$ level.

The second statistical qualifying criterion for trend statement recommendation required each trend statement desirability and feasibility group score to attain high reliability, at least 0.80 or higher. Cronbach's alpha reliability statistics were calculated on all trend statement desirability scores and all trend statement feasibility scores to determine trend statement group reliability. The higher the trend statement group score, the more reliable the trend statement group (Santos, 1999). Trend statement group reliability scores of 0.80 or higher were considered satisfactory (Bland, 1997). Trend statement desirability and feasibility scores that attained both statistical qualifying criteria qualified as trend statement recommendations. Trend statement desirability and feasibility scores that did not attain both statistical qualifying criteria were deemed as important trend statements but not as crucial for future independent school K–12 quality physical education program guidelines and were eliminated from further statistical analysis.

**Establishing Physical Education Recommendations**

To qualify as a physical education recommendation, each physical education recommendation qualified as being at least desirable, 3.5 or higher, and at least feasible, 3.5 or higher, and attained group desirability high reliability and group feasibility high reliability.

## Opinionnaire Three

Opinionnaire Three contained the statistically strongest qualifying physical education recommendations. Opinionnaire Three was e-mailed to all panel members containing the statistically strongest physical education recommendations for ranking. The third research question required panel members to rank the physical education recommendations in the order of importance. Panel members returned all rankings via e-mail to the investigator.

## Formulating Physical Education Guidelines

From the panel members' e-mailed returned responses, mean scores for each physical education recommendation was calculated and rank ordered to formulate Tennessee independent school K–12 quality physical education program guidelines.

## Data Collection Process

The study was conducted via e-mail, which simplified the process as it provided both investigator and panel members with accessible means for data collection and study participation. A three-phase Delphi technique was implemented containing three opinionnaires to collect data for this study. Table 1 outlines the three-phase, 14-step Delphi technique that was applied to this study.

**Table 1**

*Delphi Technique Containing Three Phases and 14 Steps*

| Three Delphi Phases | 14 Delphi Steps |
|---|---|
| ***Phase One*** | Step 1. Identify the purpose of the study. |
| | Step 2. Recruit and select qualified panel members. |
| | Step 3. Investigator e-mailed panel members demographic survey and Opinionnaire One. |
| | Step 4. Panel members e-mailed investigator their completed demographic survey and Opinionnaire One. |
| | Step 5. Investigator recorded qualitative data containing panel member responses completing Phase One. |

**Table 1 (cont.)**

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Phase Two*** | Step 6. Investigator organized all panel members' returned responses to Opinionnaire One into trend statements.<br><br>Step 7. Investigator e-mailed panel members Opinionnaire Two containing the newly generated trend statements to be ranked for desirability and feasibility using a 5-point Likert scale.<br><br>Step 8. Panel members e-mailed investigator Opinionnaire Two containing their trend statement desirability and feasibility rankings.<br><br>Step 9. Investigator statistically analyzed all trend statement rankings from Opinionnaire Two for means, standard deviations, trend statement group differences, and trend statement group reliability to establish trend statement recommendations completing Phase Two. |
| ***Phase Three*** | Step 10. Investigator analyzed the statistically strongest trend statement recommendations to establish the statistically strongest physical education recommendations for Opinionnaire Three.<br><br>Step 11. Investigator e-mailed Opinionnaire Three to the panel containing the statistically strongest physical education recommendations for rank ordering.<br><br>Step 12. Panel members e-mailed investigator Opinionnaire Three containing their final rank orderings.<br><br>Step 13. Investigator statistically analyzed the returned rankings for means and standard deviations.<br><br>Step 14. From the panel member rankings, a rank order list of quality physical education program guidelines were formulated completing Phase Three of the study. |

## Results

The first research question ascertained panel member opinions regarding four main physical education issues retrieved from a review of professional literature, "image of the profession," "benefits of the curriculum," "quality of instruction," "amount of physical activity," and a fifth open-ended question asking panel members to "identify one additional physical education issue." Findings from the study generated a plethora of opinions, which were processed qualitatively and categorized and selected according to response similarities into 48 manageable trend statements.

The second research question examined ranking trend statements. Opinionnaire Two involved panel members ranking 48 panel-generated trend statements for desirability and feasibility. Of the 22 panel members that returned Opinionnaire One, 18 returned Opinionnaire Two. This represented a return rate of 82%, which indicated continued high study interest from panel members.

All 18 returned responses from Opinionnaire Two were statistically analyzed. Based on two statistical qualifying criteria—a desirability and feasibility trend statement mean score of 3.5 or higher and high trend statement group reliability, .92 and .83—of the original 48 trend statements, 25 trend statements were ranked desirable and 20 trend statements were ranked feasible and qualified as trend statement recommendations.

The third research question required the panel members to rank the statistically strongest physical education recommendations in order of importance. To qualify as a physical education recommendation, each recommendation qualified as being at least desirable and at least feasible and attained high group reliability. Out of the 25 qualifying trend statement desirability recommendations and 20 qualifying trend statement feasibility recommendations, a total of nine recommendations met the qualifying criteria. Table 2 identifies the nine qualifying physical education recommendations with accompanying desirability, DR, and feasibility, FR, mean scores.

Eighteen panel members were e-mailed Opinionnaire Three, containing the nine statistically strongest physical education recommendations, for final ranking. Panel members ranked the nine recommendations in the order that they considered most important by assigning the number 1 next to their most important recommendation and 9 next to their least important recommendation. Eighteen panel

members returned their rankings representing a 100% response rate for phase three.

From the panel member rankings, a rank order list of nine quality physical education program guidelines was formulated. Mean scores for each guideline were calculated. The guideline with the lowest mean score was ranked as the most important guideline. Table 3 lists the panel members final ranking order for all nine physical education recommendations that formulated a panel-generated, consensus-based list of Tennessee independent school K–12 quality physical education program guidelines.

**Table 2**

*Nine Qualifying Physical Education Recommendations*

| *DR M* | *FR M* | Physical Education Recommendations |
|---|---|---|
| 4.28 | 3.78 | 5. Physical education teachers take a greater role in the debate over healthy lifestyles |
| 3.83 | 3.56 | 6. Utilize the Internet and develop physical education websites to help other faculty and parents understand independent school physical education programs |
| 3.67 | 3.50 | 9. Implement a physical education open door policy for observations from parents and administrators |
| 4.61 | 3.78 | 14. Introduce a wellness/fitness curriculum |
| 4.61 | 3.50 | 21. A full credit of physical education and half a credit of health become mandatory |
| 4.89 | 4.44 | 23. Incorporate health, wellness, and fitness components into the physical education class |
| 4.50 | 3.94 | 28. Incorporate the Internet to develop networking opportunities so that teaching ideas can be shared |
| 4.61 | 3.72 | 41. Offer in addition to physical education classes the opportunity for students to participate in competitive/ noncompetitive sporting activities and sport clubs |
| 4.22 | 3.83 | 48. Introduce fitness testing into the lower schools |

**Table 3**

*Tennessee Independent School K–12 Quality Physical Education Program Guidelines*

| Rank Order | Tennessee Independent School K-12 Quality Physical Education Program Guidelines |
|---|---|
| 1 | Incorporate health, wellness, and fitness components into the physical education class |
| 2 | Introduce a wellness/fitness curriculum |
| 3 | A full credit of physical education and half a credit of health become mandatory |
| 4 | Introduce fitness testing into the lower schools |
| 5 | Offer in addition to physical education classes the opportunity for students to participate in competitive/noncompetitive sporting activities and sport clubs |
| 6 | Physical education teachers take a greater role in the debate over healthy lifestyles |
| 7 | Incorporate the Internet to develop networking opportunities so that teaching ideas can be shared |
| 8 | Utilize the Internet and develop physical education websites to help other faculty and parents understand independent school physical education programs |
| 9 | Implement a physical education open door policy for observations from parents and administrators |

## Discussion

Independent K–12 schools and their boards of trustees, administrators, teachers, and coaches offer unique programs and face significant challenges. To meet these challenges, Ruder (1993) believes it is time that physical educators demonstrate an involvement in and a commitment to the profession. According to Ennis (2003), implementing a quality physical education program is pivotal in meeting the school's mission and can help meet the academic expectations of concerned parents. Therefore, regular evaluation of physical education practices can determine standards expected from a quality physical education program (Murray & Mann, 1993).

Formulating quality physical education program guidelines generated from a panel of independent school physical education representatives may increase the educational value of physical education and further develop the quality of Tennessee independent school K–12 physical education programs. Reaching a level of mutual agreement by a Tennessee panel of physical education representatives pertaining to Tennessee independent school K–12 quality physical education guidelines provides physical education policy makers with valuable information. Information may assist in meeting Tennessee independent school K–12 quality education family expectations and in demanding Tennessee independent school K–12 academic standards.

The most important guideline generated by the statewide panel of physical education representatives was "Incorporate health, wellness, and fitness components into the physical education class." Implementing a physical education program that includes a combination of health, wellness, and fitness into Tennessee independent K–12 schools was highly desirable and highly feasible among the panel of experts. This guideline was supported by panel members ranking "Introduce a Wellness/Fitness Curriculum" as their second most important ranking. Considering the increase in obesity among children and adolescents; the rise in health costs, medical costs, and insurance costs; and the rise in sedentary habits among youth, this guideline may interest parents of children attending independent schools, independent school physical education policy makers who are responsible for program planning, and independent school physical educators who are accountable for the physical, mental, and social well-being of independent school children.

Guidelines "A full credit of physical education and half a credit of health become mandatory" and "Introduce fitness testing into the lower schools" ranked highly among the panel of experts. Awarding greater academic credit for physical education and health and introducing fitness testing may increase the academic value of physical education. This is encouraging considering, on too many occasions, school administrations sacrifice physical education class time for what they believe are more valuable academic subjects. Introducing fitness testing in the lower schools provides physical educators with opportunities to increase academic learning at a young and impressionable age where good and bad habits easily and quickly form. Testing provides opportunities for teachers and

students to evaluate and analyze performance. Feedback that clearly tracks student physical education progress can then be delivered on a regular basis to students, parents, and administration.

The fifth most important guideline formulated by the panel of experts addressed "Offer in addition to physical education classes the opportunity for students to participate in competitive/noncompetitive sporting activities and sport clubs." Increasing school children physical activity opportunities may decrease a sedentary lifestyle. Offering competitive/noncompetitive sporting activities and sport clubs in the independent school environment allows children to participate in additional physical activity opportunities. In addition, participating in sporting activities and sport clubs offers school children unique and developmental social opportunities away from computers, Internet, cell phones, and texting in a safe and physically active environment.

Guideline six, "Physical education teachers take a greater role in the debate over healthy lifestyles," reveals a proactive attitude regarding the health and well-being of students. This may again attract interest and support from concerned parents that search for preventative measures to combat family health issues and escalating health costs. Guideline seven, "Incorporate the Internet to develop networking opportunities so that teaching ideas can be shared," and guideline eight, "Utilize the Internet and develop physical education websites to help other faculty and parents understand independent school physical education programs," provide accessible, cost-effective teaching support within the profession and open the door of today's physical education programs to other nonphysical education faculty and parents who may base their negative opinions of low academic physical education value on past physical education experiences or on current outdated programs. The ninth most important physical education guideline, "Implement a physical education open door policy for observations from parents and administrators," invites parents and administrators to experience independent school physical education where both health and academic benefits of quality physical education programs can be experienced.

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