



Strengthening Health & Physical Education for Kentucky Students

Dear Members of the Task Force,

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you today. I write to you both as a dad and as a health and physical education teacher who has spent my career in public education. At my core, I chose this profession because health and PE uniquely provide lessons that every student carries with them every single day of their lives—decision-making, stress management, communication, and care for their own bodies.

Kentucky has strong, skill-based health and PE standards. However, implementation has always been a local decision, and pressures from testing and accountability have often pushed health and PE to the margins. The Legislative Research Commission's Office of Education Accountability has confirmed that Kentucky lacks consistent statewide requirements for PE and recess, resulting in wide variability across schools. Despite broad recognition of the benefits of physical activity, policy gaps and accountability pressures undermine consistent implementation.

As a father, I've seen this reality firsthand. My son Ray went through our public schools in eastern Kentucky. In elementary school, PE was once a week for 30 minutes. In middle school, many students received only 6–9 weeks of combined health/PE, while some never received any due to scheduling conflicts. And in high school, only a half credit of PE is required for graduation—far too little to meet the breadth of our standards.

To make matters worse, as recently as this year, Kentucky SHAPE had to advocate against bills that would have weakened requirements even further, such as allowing band or cheerleading to substitute for PE. While those activities have their own value, they do not teach the standards Kentucky students need for lifelong health.

Recommendations for Consideration:

- Strengthen Physical Education as the Cornerstone: - Keep PE central to student wellness and increase minimum time where feasible. - Protect against substitutions that dilute PE's purpose.
- Support Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs (CSPAP): - Recognize daily PE as the gold standard while also encouraging activity before, during, and after school—through recess, classroom breaks, intramurals, and after-school programs.
- Elevate Skills-Based Health Education: - Support adoption and implementation of Kentucky's updated, skills-based health education standards. - Expand opportunities for students to practice

decision-making, goal-setting, communication, and advocacy to build lifelong health literacy.

- Address Equity & Access: - Ensure all students, regardless of zip code or school schedule, receive meaningful health and PE instruction. - Require all schools to include health, PE, and wellness goals annually in their improvement plans. - Provide funding for facilities, staffing, and innovative scheduling to close access gaps.

Health and physical education are not “extras.” They are the foundation of every student’s success. Math and reading prepare students for college and career. Health and PE prepare them for life itself.

Sincerely,

Jamie Sparks

Executive Director, Kentucky SHAPE