The “Carol M. White Physical Education Program” is the only federal program that supports physical education. As part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (PL 107-110), its purpose is to “begin, develop, and improve physical education programs for all kindergarten through 12th-grade students.” The National Girls and Women in Sports Day Coalition supports this program and an increased investment in quality physical education in the U.S.

Obesity is on the rise in the United States, and one in three children is overweight or obese. Most health organizations suggest that children should receive 60 minutes per day of physical activity, but most children do not meet that goal.

- **Health risks related to obesity.** In children and youth, obesity is associated with many health risks, including cardiovascular disease, asthma, Type-2 diabetes, and psychosocial issues, such as low self-esteem and bullying. One recent study has estimated the healthcare cost of obesity to be as high as $147 billion per year. In contrast, studies have shown that when children are healthy they learn better, achieve more academically, and have better attitudes about education.

- **Benefits of physical education programs.** Fully 61.5% of children aged 9-13 do not participate in any organized physical activity outside of school, so P.E. provides a vital (and perhaps sole) opportunity for skill building and exercise. Physical education programs have both physical and mental health benefits, and are linked to future physical activity. P.E. and extra-curricular physical activity are both associated with improved academic performance, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

- **Particular benefits to girls.** In addition to the above health and academic benefits, physical activity is associated with higher self-confidence in girls. Girls are less physically active than boys. According to the CDC, vigorous activity is significantly less common among high school girls (24.8%) than boys (49.6%). Girls’ P.E. participation is generally less frequent and of a lower intensity than boys. A lack of successful physical activity experiences during their formative years has consequences for girls’ activity levels into adulthood and for illnesses such as heart disease and osteoporosis, which disproportionately affects women.

The Carol White Physical Education Program (PEP) promotes health and physical activity by supporting grants directly to local education agencies and community-based organizations for physical education. Grants may support equipment, staff, or teacher professional development, and have been used for intramurals, curriculum and facility improvements, heart-rate testing, and nutrition education. PEP was funded at $78 million in FY2009 and $79 million in FY2010, allowing for only 10% of applicants to be funded.

The National Girls and Women in Sports Day Coalition calls on Congress to preserve PEP in the ESEA reauthorization and increase appropriations for this important program. The recent bipartisan approval of the Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization (S.3307) invested $4.5 billion in better child health outcomes through nutrition. Congress should make an equivalent investment in physical activity to improve child health now and in the future.
References


