

To comment ask your question or ask your question, you can email me at charlessilberman@pgcps.org, follow me on twitter @ThePeGuy, or learn more about me at <http://www.charlessilberman.com>.

Question:

Dear Charles

I am having an issue with teachers pulling students from PE regularly for testing, as a negative consequence for classroom behavior issues, for small group instruction, or the like. Additionally, some of the small groups run all year, which means students in certain grades will not have physical education a majority of the year. Can you please help me with ideas and/or suggestions on what to do?

Thanks

C. W.

Dear C. W.,

I empathize with you. Everything you described I have experienced at some point in my teaching. Just like any other subject, you have a curriculum and mandated testing. It is very frustrating when your subject area is treated as a lower priority and used as a time for students to achieve what others decide are higher priorities. This in the face of all the data that shows how important physical education is to academic success. What is happening here is not Okay. However, despite your current situation, there are ways to work through this and have everyone come out a winner, which I will detail below.

Talk with Teachers:

The first thing I would do is communicate with the teachers via a memo. For example, I send a memo out, with my principal's signature of approval on it, in regards to fitness testing. I provide dates of testing and that I will need all students present for this. I explain how my testing is a mandate and I have a finite window to test and enter the data just like MSA. This goes to all Teachers. This makes them aware of my needs and the fact I have the principal on my side. You do not need to have a full discussion with your principal in regards to the memo. The discussion will come next. Just get his or her approval to send the memo out. This memo should go to all teachers in the school, be factual, quick, and to the point. This memo is not an avenue to call out any teachers individually or even have a hint of emotion. The memo is just a starting point. Moreover, if you have a specials team lead, make sure to clue them in on what is going on and your plan of action.

In addition to a written document to all teachers channeled through the principal, approach the teachers individually, including specialist that pull small groups, teachers pulling from testing, and teachers keeping students back because of behavior. Mention the memo as a Segway to the discussion. When you talk to them, explain your situation, and explain/show them the amount of curricular material you need to teach and how the students missing PE affects their ability to learn. Lay out the long-term scope if need be: if they do not get the basics now, it will put them further behind in middle and high school. And in high school, they need PE to graduate! One stat that I think is powerful, which is dependent on how often you see the students, is that if you boil down the time you see classes for PE in a year, minus holidays, assemblies, snow days, etc, it averages out to be somewhere around 36 to 45 hours a year per class. That is not a lot of time to work with or waste! See if you can come up with some solutions with the Teachers. This will come in handy in the next step.

Hopefully by communicating with the Teachers in person and writing with a little bit of fact will help your cause.

Talk With Your Principal:

In my first year in my county we were in between PE supervisors. So it was that much more important for me to communicate with my principals and gain their support. I would suggest you sit down and explain your situation with your principal(s). When you do this, have your memo I mentioned above in hand, and have a couple solutions from your conversations with colleagues in mind.

I cannot stress enough the importance of coming into a meeting with your principal with solutions from discussions with colleagues. This shows you have tried to solve the concerns on your own, and you are not coming to complain. It shows that you are coming to make your superior aware of your situation and seek approval or feedback on some solutions. You are much more likely to get support and change from this tactic than coming in with gripes alone.

If need be, have your lead specialist with you during this meeting. Keep it positive and solution focused, and be assertive in reiterating your needs.

Educate:

Here are a few key links that will give you information to help aid you in your conversations. When engaging your colleagues, share this information. As the old saying goes, "Knowledge is Power." Do not assume people know about the mandate or importance of PE.

Maryland's PE Requirement Via AAHPHERD:

<http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/publications/upload/Maryland-profile.pdf>

COMAR and MD PE Requirement By Laws:

<http://www.bcps.org/offices/physed/pdf/COMAR.pdf>

http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/SubtitleSearch.aspx?search=13A.04.13.*

NASPE has a position statement regarding using the withholding of PE or recess for misbehavior.

<http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/standards/upload/Physical-Activity-as-Punishment-to-Board-12-10.pdf>

Importance of PE via SPARK:

<http://www.sparkpe.org/physical-education-resources/academics-physical-activity/>

Be Realistic:

Consider that we are halfway through the second quarter of the school year, and a lot of initiatives and schedules are entrenched routines. Understand that any change at this point disrupts routine, which is hard for children to bear. Structure is important to students. This means that any changes are going to affect other teachers, classes, your class structure, and your class chemistry as well. So be prepared to manage the change that may occur.

As with any good negotiation, start with high expectations based in facts, curricular needs, and state and local mandates. I would aim for a situation that gives everyone a sense of input. Every one should come out with a positive feeling of understanding and that the change is in the best interest of the students.

Best of Luck,

Charles