

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This report summarizes the results of interviews with 5 Colorado school districts and various members of the Healthy Eating Active Living Coalition (HEAL) that took place between June 2013 and August 2013. The organizations and school districts selected for interviews were largely based on their having an established relationship with LiveWell Colorado and familiarity and experience with HB11-1069. The primary purpose of the interviews was to collect information regarding the outcomes resulting from the passage of HB11-1069, the current state of physical education (PE) programs being offered in public school and district level actions to promote PE in schools. Interviews with district representatives also explored PE requirements; district staff and structure; data collection methods and action items.

## Overview of Key Findings

- 1. HB11-1069 Impact Unclear:** Legislation passed by Colorado's House of Representatives in February 2011 requiring all public elementary schools to provide students with an opportunity to have a minimum of 600 minutes of physical activity a month during school. It was passed as a means of addressing the state's growing childhood obesity problem. Unfortunately many have been disappointed in efforts to implement the bill and the lack of data to validate its efficacy.
- 2. No State PE Requirements:** Colorado does not currently have any state requirements that specifically address PE. This lack of PE requirements makes Colorado somewhat unique given that the vast majority of other states have legislation in place requiring students at all grade levels to participate in PE. Colorado does require districts comply with state adopted PE standards.
- 3. Limited District Level Requirements:** There are few set requirements for PE offerings within any of the districts. Students in elementary schools are the most likely to have PE as part of their regular schedule. Secondary schools present a challenge as students are given the opportunity to choose from a number of electives including PE. Most districts do require PE credit to graduate, but it isn't mandated by the state and it isn't included as a component of a student's GPA. Additionally students are given the ability to waiver out of PE at any grade level if they play sports, belong to a club team or participate in marching band or ROTC.
- 4. Wellness Coordinators Support PA:** Most school districts currently employ Wellness Coordinators at the district level. Some of these positions are staff but, most are grant funded meaning there is a possibility that they will be cut once grant funding has been removed. The role of a Wellness Coordinator varies considerably by district. Most are advocates for increased PE as it provides means towards achieving the goal of 60 minutes of physical activity a day recommended by the Institute of Medicine (IOM).
- 5. No State PE Specific Teacher Requirements for K-8:** The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) does not mandate any specific standards for elementary and middle school PE teachers, beyond a

requirement that they possess at minimum a liberal arts degree and some additional coursework related to physical education. At the high school level, teachers are required to have a bachelor's in physical education ([Employment Requirements](#)). Most school districts seek to fill these positions with "highly qualified" candidates; but not all require teachers to be certified as there is no state requirement for this despite the fact that the vast majority of other states do have this sort of requirement. Additionally, the state does not require continuing education specific to PE content to maintain teaching licensure (15).

- 6. Data Collection Lacking:** Currently there is no way to accurately quantify the amount of PE students are exposed to during the school day. Grant money has been used to collect this data in some districts, but due to resource limitations comprehensive collection is not feasible. Scheduling variation by grade level and school provides an additional barrier to accurate collection and comparison by school or district. Also, the limited data that is available is not housed in a central repository making it difficult to disseminate to potential advocates.
- 7. Some Efforts Underway to Offer Quality PE:** Districts have acknowledged the value of quality PE curriculum in a number of different ways. Many provide opportunities for professional development and sharing best practices. The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) employs a team of individuals that are responsible for providing technical assistance to help promote the development of PE curriculum and practices. Many districts have also applied for grants to secure funding to help the adoption of evidence based curriculum and expand the number of PE offerings available to students at all grade levels. The support of the administration has proven to be invaluable in pushing the PE agenda forward in a number of exemplary districts. Sustainability, however, will be dependent on continued support be it through the administration or parents and the community.

### **Study Conclusions**

Across the 5 school districts interviewed, there was some variation in PE curriculum and requirements. Many of the districts have recently taken steps to build and improve on the PE offerings provided to students at all grade levels. These advancements have been made largely possible due to the support of administrators and school board members in conjunction with the tireless efforts put forth by active Wellness Teams and dedicated PE staff. The progress is promising, but there is considerable work to be done. Increased emphasis needs to be placed on the added benefits associated with quality PE programs to induce additional support and advocacy. Not only is PE a proven mechanism to help students adopt active lifestyles and a principle means of helping them maintain a healthy weight, there is also a growing body of evidence showing an association with improved academic performance, pro-social behaviors and attention span that shouldn't be overlooked. Advocates cannot rely on legislation and institutional policy alone to make these changes happen; they must take action to share the facts about PE with parents and administrators if they wish to stimulate any real change. It is important to note that this study did not explore the obstacles to offering PE from the perspective of district and school academic leadership.