

## Gym Goes Online

by Stacy Andell The traditional view of gym class is changing all over the United States. While most of us remember the endless games of kick ball and calisthenics, students at all grade levels are having a very different experience in elementary schools, middle schools and high schools across the country. The traditional gym class is shifting from team sports and group oriented activities to more independent and individual activities to keep kids active all year round.

**Reasons Behind the Change** Two factors most influence the change in the traditional gym class. On the one hand, the increasingly competitive standardized testing is taking class time away from physical education. Many schools recognize that the way to bolster test scores is to devote more time to core subjects, like math and reading, and often gym class is the place with the most room to cut from busy school schedules. This trend is taking place in schools in all areas, including urban and suburban schools. The second issue behind the shift from traditional gym class is the focus on the obesity rates of children in the United States. Educators agree that traditional formats, particularly combined with large class sizes, don't give students the amount of exercise that they need to lead healthy lives. The average group oriented gym class usually only engages a child for a few minutes out of the average hour long gym class. Think about how much time a student stands around waiting for their turn in a game of kickball and you'll see how much time the student actually participates in physical activity during a traditional gym class.

**Independent Physical Activity** Unlike the team sports that have traditionally dominated physical education, today's gym classes take advantage of the greater variety of individual activities that make the most use out of student exercise time. Activities like yoga, martial arts, bike riding, and jogging have come to the forefront in modern physical education where the new focus is on tailoring gym class to meet the needs of the students who take it and, hopefully, help them to develop lifelong habits of regular exercise. While many students get embarrassed by their lack of coordination in team sports, there is a much greater variety of activities that students can participate in, taking the attention off of performing in a group and onto establishing strong personal exercise and fitness goals. By encouraging independent physical activities, physical education programs encourage more students to take responsibility for their personal fitness and feel better about themselves when they exercise.

**Taking it Online** Many schools are taking the gym student completely out of the gym by making it an independent study class. In this way, students get credit for doing physical activities outside of school, such as taking a martial arts class or jogging a certain amount of time each day before school. Such programs take the pressure off of the student's class schedule, allowing them to focus more on academic areas in school and enjoying physical activity outside of school. Student and physical education teachers track progress and work together to set goals without using valuable academic time in school. Schools across the country have set up online monitoring programs where students can measure their individual activities while keeping everyone healthy and happy.

## About the Author

Stacy Andell is a staff writer for Schools K-12, providing free, in-depth reports on all U.S. public and private K-12 schools. Stacy has a nose for research and writes stimulating news and views on school issues. For more on schools visit <http://www.schoolsk-12.com>.

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