

Technology, emotional skills covered in new PE standards

By Merri Rosenberg
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

No one yet knows when or how students will return to school buildings. But when they do, physical education will be different.

The changes will reflect not only social distancing requirements and new hygienic needs, but also the early stages of implementing new standards for physical education – the first update in 20 years.

After a two-year process that involved educators and community members from across the state, the State Education Department (SED) has revised PE standards to align more closely with how educators view the discipline and the lifelong lessons they expect students to absorb. Among the changes: an increased role for technology and an emphasis on social-emotional learning.

The time table, which was developed prior to the coronavirus pandemic, calls for a period of awareness-raising and training beginning this fall. The new standards are scheduled to be implemented by fall 2023.

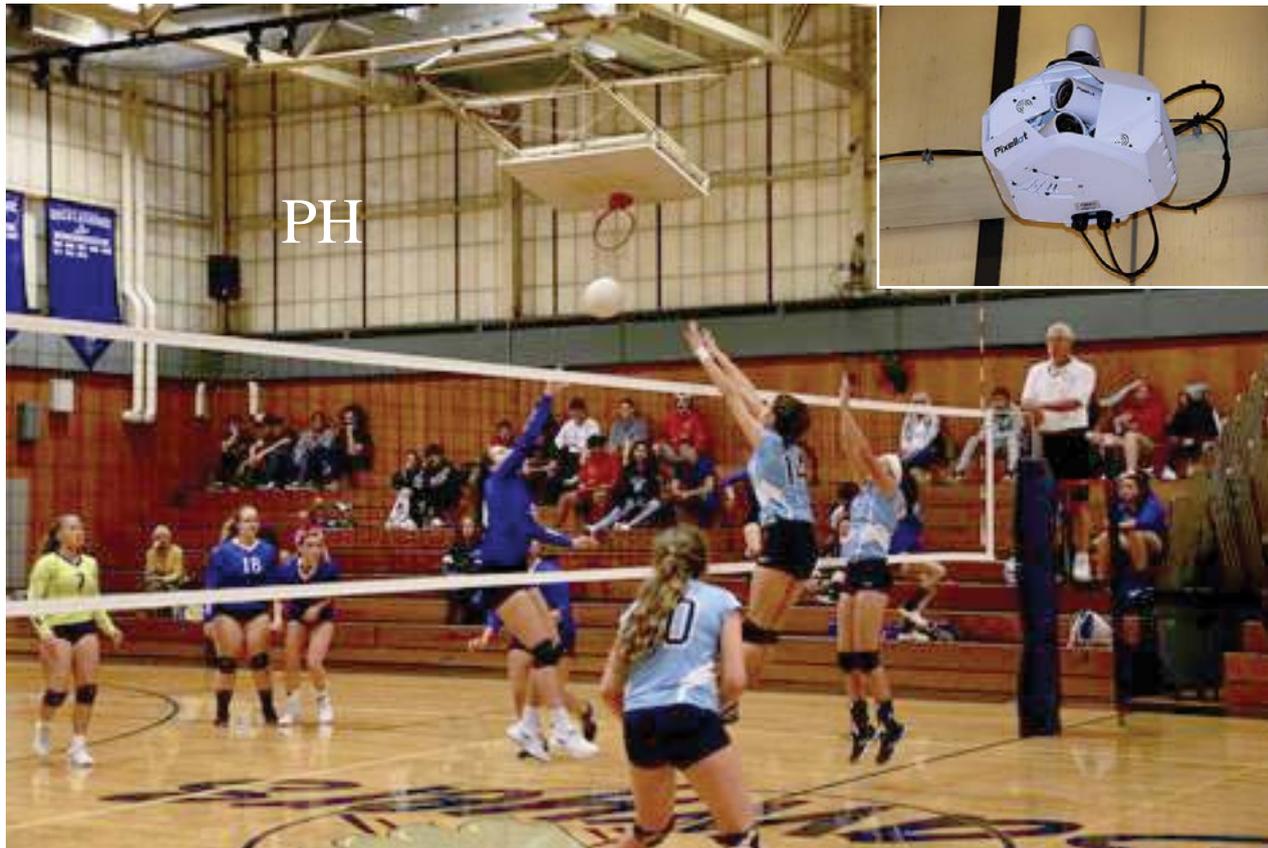
“These standards are unique to New York State,” said Clancy Seymour, a member of the team that developed the new standards and an assistant professor and director of Physical and Health Education Teacher Education at Canisius College in Buffalo. “They are not prescriptive. It’s not curriculum. It’s a code, versus a curriculum. Standards have to do with outcomes.”

Seymour noted that the introduction to the standards makes an analogy that compares architects, who deal with the building code, and master contractors, who do the hands-on work. Similarly, the standards are intended to guide PE teachers.

“The standards reflect physical literacy,” Seymour explained. “It’s the individual journey to physical literacy. It’s the connection to the whole child, including mental health, social and emotional learning, and overall wellness.” Team sports are not emphasized, he added.

The standards also reflect initiatives from SED, including New York State’s Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks and the state’s mental health education initiative.

The social and emotional learning piece would, for instance, “deal with winning and losing,” said David Garbarino, physical education director at Binghamton



Before the pandemic, Kristine Conte of Ulster BOCES Communications Service took this photo at a girls varsity volleyball game at Saugerties High School, which recently installed two automated Pixelot cameras for live video-streaming of games (inset). The cameras were free as part of an offer made to schools that are part of Section 9. Photo courtesy of Ulster BOCES

City School District in Broome County, and a member of the authoring work group.

In some respects, the standards are catching up with current practice. “Twenty years ago there was one ball and all the students shared it,” said Garbarino. “Now everybody has a ball.” The next step is to have individual benchmarks and expectations. This approach will become more common under the new standards as PE teachers follow the personalized instruction model familiar to classroom teachers in other subjects.

The new standards also recognize the increased role technology plays in physical education, according to another member of the authoring work group. Maryanne Ceriello, who retired from the Beacon City School

District in Dutchess County in June 2019, noted that pedometers, heart rate monitors and similar equipment can quantify and personalize the experience for students. For example, a very athletic and fit student might not actually be working as hard as she should be to get a particular result, while a more sedentary student might actually be expending more energy and effort.

As a result, iPads, Power Point and YouTube videos are destined to be as much a part of gym class as exercise bands and volleyballs. In fact, they already are.

“Many of us have come to embrace technology,” said Ceriello. “When I had yoga with K-2, I used Power Point to project the image to show them how to do a pose.”

While there was mostly consensus within the working groups, some debate concerned recommendations for which skills should be taught in a given year. Garbarino said the standards are “vertically aligned, seen as stepping stones so students keep on growing.”

The new standards “more clearly define the developmental levels of the social and emotional aspect of PE,” said Ceriello.

The process was painstaking as committee members directly compared the old state standards to the national standards, as well as another state’s standards, then “went line by line through the learning objectives,” said Ceriello. “It was important to get consistency.”

One of the unique features of New York State’s standards is that there is a focus on opportunities for recreation and fitness such as cross country skiing in the Adirondacks, hiking in the Hudson Valley, walking along the Erie Canal or taking advantage of the beaches on Long Island for boating and swimming. The idea is to help students appreciate what their communities offer as they develop habits to stay healthy and fit throughout their lives.

“We want kids when they graduate to have such a great experience about moving that whatever way they feel, they’ll find as many different ways as possible” to be active, Garbarino said. “We’re trying to give them a jump start.”

Examples of new PE standards

Here is a quick overview of some of the new state standards for physical education:

First grade: motor skills. Overall, the standards are concerned with students’ learning about how physical activity and movement affects them. The standards focus on students’ abilities in “a variety of motor skills and movement patterns,” including sports and games, fitness, as well as dance and rhythmic activities. The standards also include fitness and how activity affects the heart and lungs. First graders are also expected to be able to follow rules and take turns during class.

Fourth grade: Fitness and wellness. At an age when students typically become more competitive, the standards explore ways students can associate health-related fitness activities and how they correlate with general wellness. By this stage, students should be able to display responsible behavior in class with minimal teacher direction.

Eighth grade: group activities. By eighth grade, students have more specialized motor skills, particularly in the areas of balance and object control. At this grade level, there is an emphasis on students’ behavior

during group activities. These students are expected to apply rules, and accept responsibility for their individual improvement, as well as respect diversity. Students should also be able to demonstrate their understanding of how fitness correlates to overall wellness.

High school: Lifelong fitness. And by junior and senior years of high school, there is a shift to help students make plans for how they will continue lifelong physical fitness, including an understanding of community resources that will help them achieve their wellness goals. The fitness standard, for example, expects students to design and implement their own personal lifelong physical activity plan, as well as their own behaviors to enhance health.

By the time students graduate, they should also be able to evaluate the challenges and enjoyment of specific, self-selected physical activities, and the claims of programs or products that relate to fitness, physical performance and wellness.

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