

# Revitalizing Physical Education in New York City Schools

Year One Report on *PE Works* Initiative, 2016





### What is *PE Works*?

The *PE Works* initiative is an unprecedented, multi-year investment by Mayor de Blasio that envisions physical education (PE) as a foundational component of our schools and seeks to revitalize this critical subject area for all of our students. *PE Works* began as a pilot in about 400 schools in the 2015-16 school year, and is expanding Citywide in 2016-17.

### Why is Physical Education important?

Physical education class is essential to learning. It is an academic subject that students need and deserve in order to keep their minds and bodies active so that they can focus in school and develop healthy habits for a lifetime.

In physical education, students learn about their bodies, how to take care of them, and how to move. Certified, well-trained teachers help students develop a love of learning through a variety of physical activities. They teach students the skills and benefits of setting individual fitness goals, being good team players, and becoming part of a healthy community. Research shows strong connections between fitness, activity and academic achievements. Concepts and skills that students learn in physical education help them succeed academically and have the best chance to live a healthy life



### Why do we need *PE Works*?

While emerging research shows that physical education, not the outdated concept of “gym class,” is a critical component of student wellbeing and academic success, this subject area has not been prioritized nationally for many decades. In New York City, PE is provided, but often inconsistently, and not always as a valued academic subject that is foundational to learning and for preparing students for life beyond school.

Recognizing that students benefit from vibrant physical education and that to provide it, schools need additional, dedicated support to overcome long-standing challenges, the City made an initial \$6M investment in school year 2015-16 to pilot an improvement model to restore physical education – *PE Works*, New York City’s commitment to help every school unlock the potential of great PE for our students.

## ***PE Works Year 1 findings***

In the 2015-16, City level PE specialists visited more than 400 schools in eight districts—Districts 4, 8, 9, 17, 19, 25, 29, and 31— with the goals of transforming PE in these schools over the course of three years and identifying strategies to revitalize PE in every school Citywide. Program and instructional experts provided targeted PE training and support, including start-up funds for 50 elementary schools that needed to hire a certified PE teacher. During initial visits in Year 1 of the initiative, staff assessed PE programming and instruction to learn more about the systemic barriers to quality PE, as well as to help schools identify what steps they could take, over time, to improve PE and meet State requirements.

These findings inform our next steps, including the Mayor’s \$100M commitment to expand *PE Works* to all schools Citywide over the next several years.

**Is PE provided?** Almost all (96%) of the elementary schools failed to provide the required time and frequency of PE instruction that is necessary for young students to master PE skills according to State standards. Middle and high schools were more likely to schedule the appropriate time and frequency for PE, but many struggled to maximize available class time so that all students benefitted from instruction.

**Is PE a priority for school leaders?** While generally receptive to improving PE, administrators in more than half of schools (57%) would benefit from a deeper understanding of PE standards, policy requirements, and instructional strategies necessary to develop strong PE instruction, especially in elementary schools (77%).

**Is there enough space for PE?** Most schools have dedicated activity space, but some lacked access to sufficient physical

environments where all students can learn and move safely to achieve federal recommendations for moderate-to-vigorous activity for at least half of PE class time. In some cases, schools had limited space options, but more often, schools needed to schedule their available space and/or coordinate using shared space more effectively.

**Are there enough teachers?** While a majority of elementary and middle schools (93%) had at least one teacher assigned to PE, more than half (53%) had only one, regardless of whether the school served 400 or 1,400 students. A small share (5%) had no teacher assigned to PE. Nearly all high schools (98%) had at least one PE teacher and most had more than one.

**Are all teachers qualified?** Certified Physical Education teachers are the most qualified to provide standards-based quality PE instruction in all grades. Before 50 new certified PE teachers were hired in summer 2015, only about one out of three schools serving elementary students in the *PE Works* Year 1 cohort had a certified PE teacher. More than half of these schools have certified PE teachers now.

**Is all instruction rigorous?** The quality of instruction varies widely within schools and among districts. Even though nearly all (97%) middle and high schools had at least one certified PE teacher on staff, many (58%) with more than one, we found outdated PE practices in use and many schools where teachers did not consistently utilize sequential, standards based curricula. While we found schools with dynamic PE teachers, strong programs, and rigorous PE instruction, we must ensure that this is what all, not just some, of NYC students experience.

## ***PE Works Year 1 actions***

As we visited the Year 1 cohort of schools (see Appendix I), we began laying the groundwork for long-term PE improvements Citywide:

**Filled Elementary PE staffing gaps** by providing funding for 50 schools that needed a certified PE teacher to hire and retain one. As a cohort, new teachers received professional development throughout the year alongside 40 existing common branch PE teachers from these schools.

**Developed strong communities of practice**, with 11 new monthly K-12 PE Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) Citywide engaging more than 500 PE teachers; 200 unique PE workshops with more than 1,000 participants; facilitation training and events for PE teachers seeking leadership opportunities; and access to State and national professional conferences.

**Strengthened school collaboration** among elementary PE and classroom teachers to provide supplementary activity through a new train-the-trainer model, in which 84 elementary PE teachers were trained to turn-key Move-to-Improve, our classroom based physical activity program, to 1,150 classroom teachers in their schools. (See Appendix II on Move-to-Improve.)

**Provided more wellness grants and resources** (\$400K), including more than 50 additional grants for schools to start wellness councils; 45 new CHAMPS middle school activity programs; PE equipment kits; and substitute teacher coverage for professional development.

**Worked with programming experts** to identify actionable scheduling changes in 13 pilot schools so that PE is programmed equitably and appropriately to meet State requirements.

**Coordinated with central and district level staff** to prioritize PE in school planning, staffing, and improvement efforts.

## ***PE Works in Year 2 and beyond***

Year 1 of *PE Works* offered unprecedented insight into the specific challenges that our schools face in providing PE. We also saw the tremendous potential for impact that tailored action plans, curricular guidance and a range of structural supports could have in helping school leaders and teachers provide an environment where physical education thrives and students learn.

Understanding both the need and the opportunity, in April 2016, Mayor de Blasio committed \$100M to expand the work of Year 1 and bring the *PE Works* model to all schools Citywide. Expanding *PE Works* will provide the school- and district-level assistance for all schools at all grade levels to build, provide, and sustain standards-based PE.

Over the next three years, a dedicated *PE Works* team will work with every district school to complete a needs assessment, create a multi-year action plan in collaboration with teachers and administrators, and provide instructional, operational, and family engagement support so that PE can thrive. *PE Works* staff will develop and rollout a K-12 PE Scope and Sequence so that teachers, administrators, and parents know the benchmarks of good PE instruction for students at all grades.

By June 2019, with the help of 500 new certified PE teachers hired for elementary schools that need one, all elementary schools are expected to meet State PE requirements (Appendix III).

Students are the City's most precious resource. Each child needs and deserves a public education that prepares them to set goals, work collaboratively, and take care of their bodies to better their minds. The *PE Works* mission is for schools to deliver an outstanding physical education experience to every student so that they can think, move, and achieve, in school and throughout their lives.

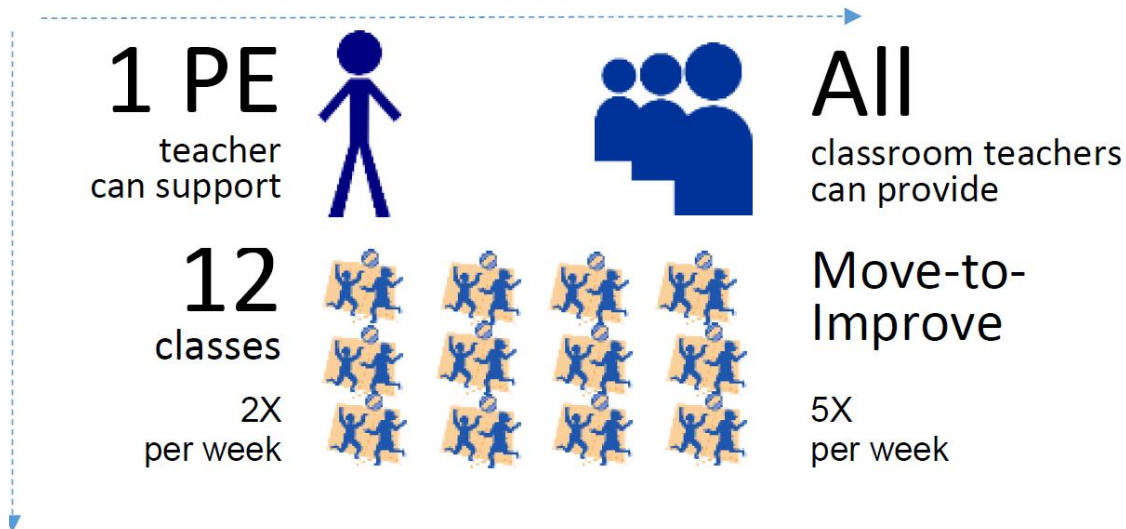
For more on *PE Works*, visit [schools.nyc.gov/wellness](https://schools.nyc.gov/wellness).

## Appendix I. Number of PE Works Cohort 1 Schools, from Districts 4, 8, 9, 17, 19, 25, 29, and 31, by Grade Level

Source: LCGMS, August, 2015; Notes: n=421; schools collectively serve 244,000 students

Grades	Number of Schools
Elementary (K-5)	191
Elementary & Middle (K-8)	31
Middle (6-8)	83
Middle & High (6-12)	27
High (9-12)	88
K-12	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>421</b>

## Appendix II. How Move-To-Improve Classroom Based Physical Activity Program Helps Elementary Schools Meet Daily PE Requirement



### Appendix III. Physical Education Time, Frequency, and Staffing Requirements

Source: New York State Commissioner's Regulations

Grade Level	Time & Frequency	Staffing
<b>Grades K-3</b>	120 minutes per week of daily PE	Common branch teachers may provide PE under the guidance of a certified PE DOE teacher
<b>Grades 4-5</b>	120 minutes per week of PE at least 3 times per week	
<b>Middle School</b>	90 minutes per week; PE 3 times per week in one semester and 2 times per week in the other (or equivalent schedule)	PE-certified DOE teacher
<b>High School</b>	<p>Four credits of PE are required for graduation using one of these schedules:</p> <p>a) 90 minutes per week, 3 times per week in one semester and 2 times per week in the other for 8 semesters (or equivalent schedule), or</p> <p>b) 180 minutes per week with daily physical education class, for 7 semesters</p>	PE-certified DOE teacher