

How SPARK Aligns With California's State Standards for Physical Education

SPARK Overview:

Since 1989, SPARK (Sports, Play, and Active Recreation for Kids) has been a pioneer in the systemic reform of physical education (PE), creating, implementing, and evaluating programs that promote lifelong wellness. SPARK researchers and educators have revised their PE curricula and training programs to meet California Physical Education content standards. The purpose of this paper is to provide evidence of SPARK alignment.

SPARK Philosophy (The numbers below reference research papers provided at the end of this paper):

In addition to the five over-arching California standards for PE, SPARK supports Healthy People Goals (HPG) 2010 Objective. This states that PE classes should strive to engage students in moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) at least 50% of class time. SPARK research showed this goal was achieved in both PE specialist and classroom teacher settings (5), without sacrificing academic achievement (7) or student enjoyment of PE (3). SPARK believes, and studies have shown, that by focusing content and instruction to meet NASPE and California standards and the HPG Objective, that positive health outcomes of students can be achieved. In addition to MVPA (5), these include physical fitness (5) and sports skills (2). To reach these outcomes, SPARK programs include strategies that promote behavior and environmental change techniques (1). When and where implemented, SPARK strives to institutionalize concepts and methods, and follow up studies have shown SPARK sustainability to be very high (4).

SPARK Adaptations:

SPARK advocates for quality, daily PE instructed by qualified specialists. The majority of schools nationwide do not provide this, and therefore, frequency and duration are often insufficient to improve student health parameters. To adapt to various PE scenarios, SPARK modifies their interventions to adjust to variances (e.g., who actually provides instruction, specialist or classroom teacher; and the quantity and quality of PE taught). For example, in schools where a PE specialist only sees students once a week, SPARK encourages classroom teachers to supplement the dose, with the goal being to provide a minimum of 3 days a week of structured, standards-based instruction.

California Standards for Physical Education

Standard 1: Demonstrate motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities.

Standard 2: Demonstrate knowledge of movement concepts, principles, and strategies as they apply to learning and performance of physical activities.

Standard 3: Assess and maintain a level of physical fitness to improve health and performance.

Standard 4: Demonstrate knowledge of physical fitness concepts, principles, and strategies to improve health and performance.

Standard 5: Demonstrate and utilize knowledge of psychological and sociological concepts, principles, and strategies as applied to learning and performance of physical activity.

SPARK Compliance to California Standards

California Standard	SPARK Alignment
Standard 1: Demonstrate motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities.	SPARK content (lesson plans provided in scope and sequence) and training sessions (workshops conducted at school sites) present many movement activities to meet this standard as well as the necessary pedagogical skills. Additionally, via both SPARK content and targeted handouts at workshops, SPARK assessment tools demonstrate student achievement of competency and/or improvement in Standard 1. Additionally, SPARK's commitment to MVPA, fitness and skills (papers demonstrate significant student achievement in all three) further support alignment with this goal.
Standard 2: Demonstrate knowledge of movement concepts, principles, and strategies as they apply to learning and performance of physical activities.	SPARK content (lesson plans provided in scope and sequence) and training sessions (workshops conducted at school sites) present many movement activities to meet this standard as well as the necessary pedagogical skills. Additionally, via both SPARK content and targeted handouts at workshops, SPARK assessment tools demonstrate student achievement of competency and/or improvement in Standard 2.

Standard 3: Assess and maintain a level of physical fitness to improve health and performance.

During PE:

SPARK promotes physical fitness in almost every lesson and in grades 3-8, SPARK provides a Personal Best Day (PBD) fitness test. This teaches students how to monitor their fitness progress over time, and administers three objective fitness tests. Additionally, PBD prepares students systematically for fitness testing via use of the Fitnessgram, Physical Best, or Presidential programs. SPARK outcomes show measurable and significant improvement in fitness parameters – compared to non-SPARK trained teachers' students.

SPARK advocates for quality, daily, physical education. SPARK has been proven to increase moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) to above 50% during PE classes in both specialist and generalist settings. SPARK content and instruction are designed to provide all children maximum opportunities to participate and practice skills and engage in health-related fitness activities. SPARK's commitment to MVPA, fitness and skills (papers demonstrate significant student achievement in all three) further support alignment with this goal.

Outside of PE class:

SPARK encourages environmental change that promotes PA throughout the school day (e.g., before and after school programs, recess and lunch breaks, integration with core subjects and PA in the classroom). SPARK works with teachers to enhance their PE content to include more lifetime activities (e.g., Frisbee, golf, yoga, etc.), as well as movement opportunities that generalize to the community (e.g., kayaking in Alaska, surfing in Southern CA, lacrosse in New England, etc.). Additionally, SPARK teachers are trained to encourage regular physical activity outside of PE through promotional techniques (e.g., teachers ask students what activities they have participated in over the weekend, if anyone walked to school, or how they are doing with their PAL (physical activity logs) that monitor movement outside of PE class and offer PA goal-setting opportunities).

The SPARK Lifelong Wellness (LW) program was shown to be effective in increasing the number of minutes students are active outside of PE class, and anecdotally, teachers and parents reported increases in their own personal activity programs.

Standard 4: Demonstrate knowledge of physical fitness concepts, principles, and strategies to improve health and performance.

SPARK promotes physical fitness in almost every lesson and in grades 3-8, SPARK provides a Personal Best Day (PBD) fitness test. This teaches students how to monitor their fitness progress over time, and administers three objective fitness tests. Additionally, PBD prepares students systematically for fitness testing via use of the Fitnessgram (state mandated testing program). SPARK outcomes show measurable and significant improvement in fitness parameters – compared to non-SPARK trained teachers' students.

The SPARK LW program has been developed for elementary physical education specialists, classroom teachers, and after school program leaders and has also been used effectively in middle school environments. SPARK LW is designed to teach children and adolescents the skills necessary to be active outside of physical education class, on the weekends, during vacations, and ultimately the rest of their lives. Additionally, students learn how to make healthy food choices, reduce time playing video games and watching television (low-voltage activities). Behavior change components are woven throughout the LW program and include goal setting, rewards, scheduling time for activity, obtaining social support, scheduling and planning skills, environmental stimulus, and positive self-talk.

Standard 5: Demonstrate and utilize knowledge of psychological and sociological concepts, principles, and strategies as applied to learning and performance of physical activity..

SPARK includes the teaching of social skills in all programs and reinforces this during teacher training opportunities. Utilizing a t-chart, SPARK trained teachers learn how to facilitate discussion of the social skill, solicit student responses on what that skills looks like and sounds like, and how to assess student compliance during class. Because SPARK emphasizes inclusion and spends significant time during workshops on student empowerment techniques and graduated differentiated learning, the learning environment fosters self-confidence, positive self-image, and self-esteem in every child. The no or low-competitive nature of SPARK strives to provide an equal opportunity for physical activity for every child, regardless of skill level. Facilitating individual student success everyday enhances one's personal skills and enjoyment of PE, and thus encourages repeating movement experiences outside of class.

Via student surveys, it was demonstrated that SPARK activities were enjoyed by students, and over the years, SPARK continues to edit and enhance content with student enjoyment in mind. Challenge is a large part of SPARK pedagogy, and in teacher training opportunities, a concerted effort is made to move teachers from direct and command style to using inclusionary techniques and empowering students via greater student centered learning strategies. Presenting activities with a challenge and a question instead of a mandate is a SPARK pedagogy trademark. Partner and group activities, many of which are cooperative, creative, and problem-solving in nature, serve to foster self-expression and positive social interactions during class.

Additionally, the Lifelong Wellness program reinforces these concepts and provides activities that address them in a classroom setting and/or during inclement weather days where activity opportunities may be limited.

Cited references:

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3. McKenzie, T. L., Alcaraz, J., & Sallis, J. F. (1994) Assessing children's liking for activity units in an elementary school physical education curriculum. Journal of Teaching in Physical Education, *13*, 206-215.
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