In any discussion of physical education for children, there are five major premises that guide thinking about, planning for, and evaluating physical education programs.

The ultimate purpose of any physical education program is to guide children into being physically active for a lifetime.

More than ever we live in a world of rapid change. Tomorrow’s physical activities may look quite different from those of today. Present programs need to develop competency in basic movement skills that can be used in any activity, whether it be popular today or yet to be invented. Mastery of basic movement skills encourages the development and refinement of more complex skills leading to safe and enjoyable participation in physical activity.

When basic movement skills are developed at an early age and expanded during childhood and early adolescence, children will gain access to a wide variety of physical activities. Early specialization in specific sports and a limited range of opportunities to master basic skills in physical education limits later participation options.

Children should engage in physical activity appropriately designed for their developmental levels.

Children are not miniature adults. Physical activity and sports that are appropriate for adults are not appropriate for children. Kindergarten boys and girls are not the same as sixth-graders; their programs of physical education should not be the same. The physical education curriculum should reflect the natural physical and mental development of children. To be effective in promoting lifetime activity habits early in life, selection of developmentally appropriate activities for elementary-age students is essential.

Recess and physical education are important, but different, parts of the school program. Recess is an important part of the school day for children. Activity breaks may enhance participation and learning in the classroom in addition to the benefits gained from physical activity. Not only does recess provide opportunities for needed physical activity, but this unstructured time also provides opportunities for student decision making and contributes to creativity and social learning. Children learn how to cooperate, compete constructively, assume leader/follower roles, and resolve conflicts by interacting in play.

Play is an essential element of children’s development. Whereas recess is unstructured time, physical education is a planned instructional program with specific goals and objectives. An essential part of the total curriculum, it is the role of physical education programs to increase the physical competence, health-related fitness, and self-responsibility that facilitates enjoyment of physical activity for all students. Children who establish physical activity habits when they are young are more likely to remain active as as adults, and at risk for the negative results of inactivity.

Physical activity and physical education are not the same. Physical education is an instructional program taught by teachers with professional credentials in physical education. Physical education programs facilitate the achievement of national standards for physical education. Physical activity is the subject matter of physical education. The goal of the physical education program is participation in health-enhancing physical activity for a lifetime. The physical education instructional program provides the skill base for that participation. Participation in physical activity is an important component of physical education as well as a goal. Physical
education programs should provide a significant amount of time for physical activity, i.e., active participation for all students. Other opportunities should also be provided daily for physical activity in the school setting (recess and short activity periods), and physical activity should be promoted outside the school setting. Children should be provided a wide variety of learning experiences related to physical activity options and instructed in how to make positive choices regarding activity.

**Physical education and athletic programs are different.**

Athletic programs are essentially designed for youngsters who have special skill and/or would like to specialize in one or more sports and refine their skills in order to compete with others of similar interests and abilities. Developmentally appropriate physical education programs are designed for every child—from the gifted to the physically challenged. The intent is to provide children of all abilities and interests with a foundation of movement experiences and understanding that will lead to lifelong active and healthy lifestyles.