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## Short paper

### **New Health and Physical Education Curriculum for Middle and High School in Japan**

### **Nuevo plan de estudios de salud y educación física para las escuelas secundarias y bachillerato en Japón**

### **Novo plano de estudos de Saúde e Educação física do ensino básico e secundário no Japão**

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## **Abstract**

In Japan, classes are taught uniformly throughout the country based on the "Courses of Study" provided by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The latest curricula were revised in 2017 for middle schools and in 2019 for high schools. The purpose of this paper is to identify the modifiable aspects of the new curriculum introduced for health and physical education in Japanese middle and high schools from three perspectives.

**Keywords:** Health, Physical Education, Curriculum guidelines



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## Resumen

En Japón, las clases se imparten de manera uniforme en todo el país sobre la base de los "Cursos de estudio" proporcionados por el Ministerio de Educación, Cultura, Deporte, Ciencia y Tecnología (MEXT). Los últimos planes de estudio se revisaron en 2017 para las escuelas secundarias de primer ciclo y en 2019 para las de segundo ciclo. El objetivo de este artículo es identificar los aspectos modificables del nuevo plan de estudios introducido para la salud y la educación física en las escuelas japonesas de secundaria y bachillerato desde tres perspectivas.

**Palabras clave:** Salud, Educación Física, Directrices curriculares

## Resumo

No Japão, as aulas são ministradas uniformemente em todo o país com base nos "Cursos de Estudo" fornecidos pelo Ministério da Educação, Cultura, Desporto, Ciência e Tecnologia (MEXT). Os currículos mais recentes foram revistos em 2017 para as escolas secundárias inferiores e em 2019 para as escolas secundárias superiores. O objetivo deste artigo é identificar os aspectos modificáveis do currículo recentemente introduzido para a saúde e a educação física nas escolas secundárias japonesas, a partir de três perspectivas.

Palavras chave: Saúde, Educação Física, Orientações curriculares

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## Introduction

In Japan, children's physical fitness has become a social problem due to lack of exercise, and there are concerns that poor physical fitness may lead to instability to social life and



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poor academic performance. While goals have been established for each area, there is a need to ensure the amount of physical activity with adequate safety management. In health and physical education, for emphasizing the development of the qualities and abilities to maintain and promote health throughout life and to realize an enriching sports life, it is important to make students understand the relationship between healthy living and exercise and sports, and to realize that mind and body are closely connected.

## **Development**

Although physical education has always been an important part of school education in Japan, it is increasingly difficult to leave its implementation exclusively in the hands of schools, as in the past. The generational balance of teachers within schools is changing. The challenges of how to transmit diverse experiences and knowledge related to education are increasingly complex and difficult.

In the December 2016 report of the Central Education Council (2017), schools and society share the objective of creating a better society through better school education, and curricula open to society that foster the qualities in children and skills required in the new era through cooperation and collaboration between school and society.

The open curriculum must be improved in the following six areas so that it can serve as a map of learning widely shared and used by schools, families and local communities to create a virtuous environment. A cycle of improvement and empowerment of school education emerges based on the curriculum of each school. Each school was also asked to strive for curriculum management.

The six areas are: ① "What will they be able to do?" (the qualities and skills we aim to cultivate), ② "What to learn" (the importance of learning subjects and the organization of study plans based on connections between subjects and between school levels), ③ "How to learn" (creation and implementation of teaching plans for each subject, etc., and improvement and enhancement of learning and teaching), ④ "How to support the



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development of each child” (guidance based on the development of each child), ⑤ “What have they learned?” (improving learning assessment), ⑥ “What is needed for implementation?” (measures necessary to implement the principles of the Curriculum, etc.).

Consequently, the {MEXT} published the Curriculum for Early Childhood, Elementary and Middle Schools in March 2017, the Curriculum for Schools with Special Needs in Early Childhood, Elementary and Middle School in April of the same year. While that of high schools was published in March 2018. At the same time, the relevant provisions of the Implementation Regulations of the School Education Law were revised. Based on the provisions of article 33 of this law and article 52 of the Regulations for the Application of the School Education Law, the MEXT determined the Curriculum in the form of public notice, which has the character of law.

Therefore, the contents indicated in the Curriculum must be taught to all children. When necessary, schools can add content not included in the curriculum considering the real conditions and problems of children and the community. To further improve curriculum-based educational activities with the cooperation of families and the community. Each school should follow the standards as much as necessary, while adding originality and creativity. They thus assume responsibility for the composition and implementation of study plans that match the real conditions of the students, the school and the community. These curricula are reviewed every 10 years and new curricula were introduced in April 2021 for middle schools and in April 2022 for high schools.

The purpose of Health and Physical Education in Japan is "to develop the qualities and skills necessary to maintain and promote physical and mental health throughout life and to realize an enriching sporting life." The new curriculum is characterized by the fact that it divides the objective of health and physical education into three perspectives: 1) knowledge and skills; 2) the skills of thinking, judgment and expression; and 3) attitude and humanity.



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Health and Physical Education in Japan consists of two fields: Health and Physical Education. In addition, the physical education field consists of physical education skills and physical education theory. The current curriculum is based on a 12-year perspective from elementary school to high school. The educational content system is organized with emphasis on connections and perspectives between types of schools, based on the cohesion of stages of development.

To emphasize the solution of health problems in personal life, middle school health consists of four content areas: "Healthy living and disease prevention", "Development of mental and physical functions and mental health", "Injury prevention" and "Health and Environment. On the other hand, to focus on solving health problems in individual and social life, high school health consists of four content areas: "Modern society and health", "Safe social life", "Lifelong health", and "Creating a healthy environment" (MEXT, 2017b). In the area of "Health" skills, first aid such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation should be taught so that students can acquire basic skills related to health and safety in their personal and social lives (MEXT, 2017b, 2019).

Physical education theory begins in middle school and is the source of motivation, thinking ability and motor skills, and it is important to ensure that knowledge is firmly established. It is made up of (1) The diversity of sports, (2) The effects of sports and how to do them safely, (3) Sports as culture (MEXT, 2017b). Additionally, in high school, the unit consists of three sections to help students understand the importance and value of sports: (1) The origin and development of sports, (2) How to learn sports, (3) Design a rich sports life (MEXTO, 2019).

Physical education skills consist of eight areas in both middle school (MEXT, 2017b) and high school (MEXT, 2019). These are physical fitness, gymnastics with apparatus, athletics, swimming, ball games, martial arts and dance.



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Although the names of the domains are the same in middle school (MEXT, 2017b) and high school (MEXT, 2019), the content of the events in Physical Education classes is considered according to the student's stage of development.

One of the most notable aspects of the revised Curriculum is the requirement that, in principle, classes be held in a mixed environment (MEXT, 2017b; MEXT, 2019). In Japan, due to differences in physical, strength and skills among boys and girls, physical education classes in middle schools and high schools have been taught separately for each sex. However, Japan's goal in health and physical education is to achieve a rich sports life, and it has recently been shown that it is important to allow students to share various ways of enjoying exercise and sports regardless of their level of strength and physical abilities, gender, and disabilities, in order to develop the qualities and skills necessary to lead an enriching sports life.

## **Conclusions**

The originality of this study is that it analyzes revisions to the health and physical education curriculum in Japanese middle and high schools from three perspectives:

First, it further clarifies the content of instruction based on a 12-year perspective and developmental stages from elementary to high school. Second, it provides specific guidelines for further linking and teaching the fields of physical education and health. Later, consideration is given to a coexistence perspective so that the joy of exercise and sports can be shared regardless of physical fitness and ability, age, gender, and disability.

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