

Debate: A Gym Jam



Should kids be allowed to pass on gym class?

Lawmakers in Florida want kids to get moving. Back in 2009, the state began requiring middle school students to take a semester of physical education (PE) each year. But thousands of kids aren't sweating this law. Students may opt out of gym class with a note from a parent.

In some middle schools, more than one-third of students are choosing to skip PE, according to preliminary data from the Florida Department of Education. Many of those students are instead taking classes in the fine arts, such as drama or music. Others are using the time to get extra help with math or reading. Some people say it's OK to pass on PE as long as kids are getting exercise outside school.

Others say gym class is needed to address some unhealthy statistics. Obesity rates for kids ages 12 to 19 have tripled since 1980, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. PE proponents say students who learn to lead active lifestyles will keep those healthy habits with them as they become adults.

Student reporters Gray Robertson and Destiny Cuevas line up on opposite sides of the gym class debate.

Jump Into Gym!

Should kids be allowed to opt out of gym classes? Absolutely not! PE is a great way to get and stay healthy. It gives you a chance to burn off calories. In some cases, it might be the only exercise kids get each day. The problem of obesity has infected our society. PE is a great way to fight that troubling trend.

PE is also fun. "Gym gives me a chance to have some free time, and I thoroughly enjoy getting a chance to relieve my stress and take a break from my other classes," says Cooper Barnes, 13, a seventh grader from Mountain Brook, Ala.

There's more to PE than athletics. You can also develop self-confidence and learn how to work as a team. "I love seeing students work together creatively. ... PE is the next progression of recess that we all loved in elementary school," says Zach Skipper, an athletics coach at Mountain Brook Junior High School.

PE-it's Up to Me

Students should be able to choose to skip gym class. Instead, they can take a class that interests them more, such as art, drama, or music.

Many students are embarrassed because they aren't very athletic. They may get teased or feel left out in gym class. These students may be more comfortable exercising on their own time, in after-school sports or even hiking or bike riding. "Students need to exercise daily," says Russ Barnes, a math and gym teacher at Cuyama Elementary School in New Cuyama, Calif. "As long as that happens, then gym class could be offered as an elective."

There are alternatives to gym class. Schools could offer classes that aren't as tough as gym but still include exercise. Classes that are less stressful include archery, track, and yoga. That way, students are participating in classes they enjoy, getting a good grade, and getting the exercise they need.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. According to the passage, which of the following are students NOT doing instead of gym class?

- A. playing video games in the cafeteria
- B. exercising outside of school
- C. getting extra help in math or reading
- D. taking other classes in the fine arts

2. Gray Robertson argues that kids should not be allowed to opt out of gym class. What does Destiny Cuevas argue in response?

- A. The government should make a law that all students should practice yoga.
- B. Gym teachers should evaluate all students to decide which ones should take the PE.
- C. Students should be allowed to exercise in an alternative way
- D. Parents should decide what is best for their children's health.

3. Why might parents allow their kids to opt out of gym class?

- A. They think kids should take other subjects in school.
- B. They think exercise in school is important.
- C. They want their kids to learn teamwork in school.
- D. They don't want to pay for school equipment.

4. Read the following sentence and answer the question:

"PE proponents say students who learn to lead active lifestyles will keep those healthy habits with them as they become adults."

In this sentence, what does the word **proponents** mean?

- A. people that exercise
- B. people that support
- C. people that oppose
- D. people that are obese

5. The main idea of this passage is to

- A. debate whether PE should be optional for students
- B. persuade school leaders to serve healthier food in cafeterias
- C. contrast students that take PE with students that don't take PE
- D. solve the problem of child obesity

6. What are two benefits of gym class, according to the passage?

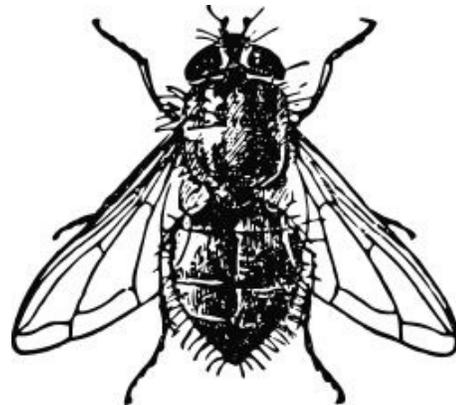
7. What could be some reasons that the obesity rate for kids tripled since 1980?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Lawmakers in Florida want kids to get moving _____ obesity rates for kids have tripled since 1980.

- A. so
- B. but
- C. because
- D. although

9. Which insect experiences a progression into something else?



10. If you ate dessert before dinner, would that be a regular progression? Why or why not?