

Health and Physical Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools Report

R.S. 17:17.4 & HCR 11 of the 2018 Regular Session
March 2026

Overview

In accordance with [Louisiana Revised Statute 17:17.4](#), the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) shall submit a written report to the Senate and House Committees on Education and the Senate and House Committees on Health and Welfare no later than March 15 of each year regarding the status of health and physical education in the public elementary and secondary schools in the state, including findings and recommendations.

In HCR 11 of the 2018 Regular Session, the legislature urged and requested that the report indicate whether each school has complied with the requirements of [R.S. 17:17.1](#) relative to daily physical activity, provide this compliance information for each month of the school year, and provide reasons for non-compliance, if applicable.

Requirements of the Resolution and Related Activities

The Louisiana State Legislature has established multiple laws related to school health, including requirements for physical activity, nutrition, and school health advisory councils. Among these, [R.S. 17:17](#) serves as a foundational statute guiding coordinated school health efforts across the state.

In 2012, the Target Coordinated School Health program became law. [RS 17:17.6](#) states, “The state Department of Education, subject to rules and regulations developed, adopted, and promulgated by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act and in consultation with the state Department of Health, shall establish and administer a targeted, coordinated school health program. The program shall be established for the purpose of reducing childhood obesity and shall bring together school administrators, teachers, other school employees, students, families, and community members to assess health needs, set priorities, and plan, implement, and evaluate school health activities directed toward this purpose.” The law establishes the program for the purpose of reducing childhood obesity and calls for collaboration among school administrators, teachers, other school employees, students, families, and community members to assess health needs, set priorities, and plan, implement, and evaluate school health activities.

To support statewide implementation of the Coordinated School Health approach, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) established the Louisiana Coordinated School Health Alliance (LCSHA) in 2017. The LCSHA is a statewide group of leaders that supports the development of healthy school environments by identifying and disseminating school health best practices and resources for policymakers and educators. This work is grounded in the understanding that when students stay healthy and ready to learn, they are more likely to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for lifelong health and success.

Building upon these coordinated efforts, additional statutory requirements have been enacted to strengthen school health practices. In 2023, [R.S. 17:17.7](#) became law, requiring each public school serving grades kindergarten through five to provide a minimum of fifteen minutes of daily recess, consisting of supervised, unstructured free play.

Through funding secured by LDOE, in partnership with the Louisiana Department of Health, schools are better equipped to increase access to nutritious foods and beverages, expand opportunities for daily physical activity, establish and sustain school health councils and teams, and more effectively manage chronic health conditions including, but not limited to, poor oral health, asthma, food allergies, and diabetes.

In alignment with [RS: 17:17.2](#), LDOE recognizes that healthy, physically active students demonstrate better academic performance, school attendance, cognitive functioning, and classroom behavior. Additionally, schools play a critical role in providing opportunities for regular physical activity before, during, and after the school day. To recognize exemplary implementation of physical activity programming, LDOE recognizes outstanding public elementary and secondary schools through the School Physical Activity Award program.

Methodology

A survey tool was developed to evaluate school systems' compliance with state health and physical education laws and related regulations. The survey was administered online in October 2025 to all public school systems and charter schools. Results are based on self-reported data submitted by participating schools and were not validated by external review. Although 89 percent of schools responded, some schools did not participate. Nonresponse may be attributable to factors such as time constraints, perceived lack of applicability, or technical challenges.

Survey Results

The highlights of the survey results are as follows:

- 1,207 of 1,345 public and charter schools (89%) responded to the survey.
- Of the schools responding, 74% reported that all physical education classes are taught by licensed teachers who are certified or endorsed to teach physical education.
- In all grades, schools reported the number of minutes of physical education taught per week:
 - 81% of schools reported 50+ minutes are taught per week.
 - 19% of schools reported less than 50 minutes are taught per week.
- In all grades, schools reported the number of minutes of health education taught per week:
 - 52% of schools reported 50+ minutes are taught per week.
 - 20% of schools reported 31-50 minutes are taught per week.
 - 12% of schools reported 16-30 minutes are taught per week.
 - 16% of schools reported 0-15 minutes are taught per week.
- In grades K-8, 92% of schools reported providing at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily. Note that reported time may include periods of unstructured activity, such as recess, and does not necessarily indicate high-quality or *sustained* moderate to vigorous physical activity.
- In grades K-5, 51% of schools reported that students are provided at least 15 minutes of recess each school day.
- In grades 6-8, 90% of schools reported that students were provided with at least 15 minutes of recess each school day.
- In all grades, 94% of schools reported that all food and beverages served and offered during the school day meet the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards.

- Fifty-two percent (52%) of schools reported having a school system-level School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) that advises the local school board on physical activity, physical and health education, nutrition, and overall student health.
- In all grades, 57% of schools reported having a team (e.g., school health council, committee, health team) that offers guidance on developing policies or coordinates activities on health topics and collaborates with their school system's School Health Advisory Council.

Recommendations

Louisiana schools continue to demonstrate commitment to student health and wellness, as reflected in compliance with nutrition and physical activity requirements; however, opportunities remain to strengthen consistency across health and physical education programs. The following recommendations, developed by LDOE, align with existing Louisiana statutes and build upon current law to support improved student health and fitness outcomes throughout the state.

Recommendation 1: Strengthen Access to Certified Physical Education Teachers

[La. R.S. 17:71](#); [Bulletin 746–Louisiana Standards for State Certification of School Personnel](#)

While current law requires appropriate teacher certification, survey data indicate that 26% of schools do not have all physical education classes taught by educators who are certified or endorsed to teach physical education. Reinforcing existing requirements aligns with LDOE’s commitment to ensuring quality teachers for every student. Support for certification pathways and professional development would reinforce existing requirements and improve access to qualified physical education teachers.

Recommendation 2: Clarify Physical Education and Daily Recess Requirements in Statute

[La. R.S. 17:17.1](#) and [17:17.7](#); [Bulletin 741–Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators](#)

Current law under R.S. 17:17.1 requires “thirty minutes each school day of quality moderate to vigorous physical activity” for public schools that include any of the grades kindergarten through eight, and R.S. 17:17.7 requires public schools serving kindergarten through grade five to provide at least fifteen minutes of daily recess. While these requirements support physical activity, they do not establish minimal instructional time requirements for standards-based physical education. As noted in the survey results above, most schools reported providing the required minimum of thirty minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity; however, due to the ambiguity of the statute, the methods used to meet this requirement vary significantly. Reported physical activity time does not necessarily reflect the delivery of high-quality or structured physical activity and may include periods such as recess, walking between classes, and/or classroom breaks. While recess provides students with the opportunity to be physically active, it does not ensure sustained or meaningful engagement in moderate to vigorous physical activity.

There is a common assumption among stakeholders that physical education minutes are required by law; however, no such requirement currently exists. This gap in statutes allows some schools and school systems to meet minimum physical activity and recess requirements without providing sufficient, high-quality physical education instruction.

Recess is also a critical component of student wellness; however, only 51% of K-5 schools reported providing the required daily minutes of recess. Additional guidance and clarification regarding recess requirements may help reinforce existing physical activity statutes and better support whole-child development in elementary grades.

Recommendation 3: Expand School System-Level School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs)

[La. R.S. 17:17.1](#)

State law authorizes SHACs to advise school boards on health-related policies; however, only 52% of schools report having one. Encouraging broader SHAC establishment and engagement would strengthen local implementation of health, nutrition, and physical activity policies.

Recommendation 4: Promote School-Level Health Teams and Coordination

[La. R.S. 17:17.6](#)

Only 57% of schools report having a school-level health team. Supporting the development of these teams would improve coordination with the school system SHACs and enhance the implementation of existing health and physical activity policies.

Conclusion

Louisiana’s statutory framework reflects a clear commitment to supporting student health, wellness, and academic success through coordinated school health, physical education, physical activity, nutrition, and related initiatives. Survey findings demonstrate meaningful progress in several areas, including high compliance with nutrition standards and daily physical activity requirements. At the same time, the data identify persistent gaps in consistency, particularly in access to certified physical education teachers, dedicated physical education instructional time, provision of required daily recess in elementary grades, and the establishment of school-level health advisory structures.

The recommendations outlined in this report build upon existing law and legislative intent by emphasizing clarification, reinforcement, and alignment. Strengthening language and guidance around physical education instructional time, recess expectations, and coordinated health leadership structures would promote more uniform implementation across school systems and schools. Continued collaboration among the Legislature, the Louisiana Department of Education, the Louisiana Department of Health, and local education agencies will be essential to ensuring that all students benefit from high-quality health and physical education programming.

By addressing these areas of opportunity, Louisiana can further advance a comprehensive, coordinated approach to school health that supports the whole child, improves long-term health and fitness outcomes, and reinforces the conditions necessary for students to be healthy, engaged, and ready to learn.

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