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**State of Vermont**  
**Vermont Department of Education**  
120 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05620-2501

June 7, 2011

Dear Vermont Education Community,

While the Vermont Department of Education does support alternative pathways to learning, it is important that such pathways are of high quality and are equally accessible to all students. The following reminder about School Quality Standards and guidance for alternative credit acquisition in physical education has been prepared because the 2010 Vermont School Health Profiles Report indicates that an increasing number of schools are exempting students from physical education for a variety of reasons.

It is noted that 55% of high school principals report students can be exempted from physical education for participation in school sports. Considering that not all students are able to participate in school sports and that these extra curricular opportunities are not typically overseen by a licensed physical education teacher, this exemption practice can lead to inequitable access and poor quality physical education programs.

In the same report 22% of middle and high school principals indicate that students with a cognitive disability can be exempted from physical education, and 79% of principals note that students with a long-term physical or medical disability can be exempted from physical education. Physical education is critical to educating the whole child. In cases where the general physical education course cannot meet the needs of a student with a cognitive or physical disability, the student should participate in adapted physical education classes provided by the school.

Please contact me for resources or with questions/concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Armando Vilaseca".

Armando Vilaseca, Commissioner of Education

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lindsay Simpson".

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Vermont Department of Education Position Statement:  
Alternative Acquisition of Physical Education Credit  
June 2011

Physical education (PE) is a required and essential component of the program of study for all students in grades PK-12. Research also indicates that adequate physical activity is associated with improved learning<sup>1</sup>. A high quality physical education program is defined in the 2006 Vermont School Quality Standards (SQS) as one driven by a curriculum that is:

- A) aligned with the Framework;
- B) coordinated across all grades;
- C) coordinated with the curriculum of other schools within the supervisory union, including between sending high schools and technical centers;
- D) revised as warranted based upon a periodic review of student performance results, learning opportunities data, new research and updated content knowledge; and
- E) designed to meet the needs of all students (SQS, 2120.8.9).

Furthermore, the SQS outline that schools are to design and implement a local comprehensive assessment system for K-12 physical education (SQS, 2120.2.2).

Ultimately decisions about PE program design and credit acquisition are made at the local level. Given the diverse needs of learners in Vermont, the Department of Education supports alternative learning pathways. The following guidelines are provided to ensure safe, high quality, equitable access to PE for all students:

1. Independent study is offered for all students in all curricular areas.
2. Independent study in PE is part of a comprehensive program designed to address and assess the entire scope and sequence outlined in the PE grade expectations.
3. A Vermont licensed PE teacher directly oversees all independent studies as part of their teaching load.
4. Students actively participate in the process of independent study course design by identifying the learning goal(s) toward which they work. Learning goals will be based on the grade expectations.
5. Students are directly responsible for documenting their engagement and assessment of learning.
6. Credit is granted for independent study in PE only upon successful completion of standards-based assessments as determined by a licensed PE teacher.

**If a school elects to offer alternative credit pathways for PE, a variance (i.e. SQS waiver) must be requested through the Vermont State Board of Education (SQS, 2121). The request should address each of the above guidelines.**

Questions or concerns should be directed to:

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Wood Johnson Foundation - Active Living Research Brief. *Active Education: Physical Education, Physical Activity and Academic Performance*. Summer 2009. <http://www.rwjf.org/files/research/20090925alractiveeducation.pdf>