

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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“Once in a while you get shown the light in the strangest of places if you look at it right”  
Robert Hunter

### WORKING TOGETHER

A major focus of Physical Education class is to provide opportunities for individual students to feel part of a group and to be able to work as a member of the group. I strongly believe that students of every age need to identify with the group and develop the ability to cooperate with schoolmates. Many of the movement activities that are part of Miquon Physical Education do support this growth. All children can experience the satisfaction and joy resulting from participation in regular vigorous physical activity. The social and emotional development fostered by the special nature of the physical education class includes: emotional control and release, self-respect, appreciation of the abilities and accomplishments of one's self and classmates, good peer relationships, regard for safety of self and others, willingness to abide by appropriate rules of play, a sense of fair play and honesty, and engaging in respectful discourse when questioning directions, instructions, or decisions given by a teacher, referee, and/or umpire. Furthermore, I hope to develop a student's ability to cooperate with classmates, to assume the role of leader and follower when appropriate, to take turns when resources are limited, to share equipment, space, ideas, and time with each other, to assist others in accomplishing a task, and to accept the challenge of a manageable movement task/risk.

The class atmosphere should enhance each child's feeling of belonging, recognize their competence in accomplishing a task or making a genuine attempt, and encourage students to celebrate their physical nature.

Another important goal of the Physical Education class is to develop an increased understanding of our natural environment. Students can become familiar with and identify with our natural environment, and work and play in an environmentally friendly way thus becoming caretakers of the school.

### SEASONAL ACTIVITIES

I divide the school year into three terms, based upon our calendar and the seasons that are divided by our longest vacations. The fall, winter, and spring terms have specific activities traditionally associated with them. The fall is a time for working outdoors in all but the worst weather. Groups can focus on building a movement identity, learning ways to play and work together, and experience our outdoor work spaces and learn to take care of them. The winter focuses on indoor activities unless we get exceptional conditions (specifically, enough snow for snow tubing or spring-like conditions).

Spring marks a return to outdoor activities, revisiting favorite games, discovering new ways to play, and having the opportunity to swim. This year, a form of baseball using a tennis racquet for the bat and tennis balls was a popular game for our older groups. Tennis Racquet Baseball became a game of choice with students from grades 3 through 6 participating on the lower field.

## DEVELOPMENTAL GYMNASTICS

An important component of our Physical Education program during the Winter Term is the Tumbling, Developmental Gymnastics, Stunts, and Self-Testing Activities Unit.

This unit combines important skill and fitness development with a child's natural interest in rolling around, climbing, jumping, balancing, and maneuvering on large gym equipment. Children in every group participate vigorously in a variety of exercises, stunts, and skills that improve a child's understanding of how the body can and does move, become strong, more flexible, energized, and safely explore a range of physical challenges.

This unit achieves the following:

1. The establishment of awareness of the position of the body in relation to the space it occupies.
2. Teaching and reinforcing the basic skills of falling correctly, jumping and landing safely from modest heights, learning to protect one's back and neck when tumbling and vaulting, and learning safety procedures for sharing play spaces above ground level.
3. Control of body movement in positions other than on one's feet.
4. Contributes to physical fitness through large muscle exercise, increasing muscular strength, endurance, and flexibility.
5. Improvement of a child's coordination, agility, and balance.
6. Provides children with experience in planning motor responses to movement problems
7. Builds a child's confidence and personal satisfaction through the successful performance of stunts and skills.
8. Provides opportunities for children to cooperate, share, and assist one another.
9. Contributes to the development of independence. Children learn to evaluate their own performance with self-testing activities.
10. Classroom learning is improved through the release of energy and tension as well as contributions to a child's positive self-image.
11. The child is encouraged in manageable risk-taking behavior.
12. Tumbling is a naturally motivating and energizing activity that reinforces the joy, health-related benefits, and the challenge of physical activity.

Developmental gymnastics activities range in complexity from group to group to account for differences in ability, experience, body type, interest, confidence, etc. Classes often include a variety of stations for vaulting, jumping and landing, tumbling, climbing, and balancing. I often arrange combinations of stations as an obstacle course. The P.E. equipment collection has a good assortment of mats, pads, and versatile gym apparatus. I try to replace older pieces each year and I am often on the look-out for new styles of pads to compliment the collection.

For the Nursery, Kindergarten, and lower elementary grades, developmental gymnastics participation is the primary focus during the winter months. The older grades use this unit as another opportunity to learn the concepts and health-related components of physical fitness, and to challenge their physical prowess. A few favorite movement challenges are the construction of agility-obstacle courses, vaulting, and the Dual Jump.

The Dual Jump is a combination of high jumping and long jumping. The event is set up as a high jump pit with a soft landing area of mats and pads, two standards (i.e. stable poles that hold the horizontal rope that is the object of the jump), and a vinyl covered rope that is weighted with bean bags to keep it taut between the standards. A large tumbling wedge is used as a take off ramp. The wedge/ramp is positioned between 4 and 6 feet from the landing area.

The object is for a student to get a running start across the gym, run up the ramp, and take off in an attempt to clear the long distance between the ramp and the landing pit, and to jump over the rope. At its highest end (the take-off point) the ramp/wedge is about two feet high. However, because it is made of foam (and is beginning to age), it does absorb some of the force of the take off, adding to the challenge.

Many of our skilled older students can clear the rope when it is set above 5 feet on the standards (measured from floor level). This year, a few students were able to clear 6 feet plus a few inches! For younger students, I move the ramp closer to the landing pit. I can set the rope horizontally at a lower level, or use a slanted rope that is higher at one end and lower at the other. This slanted rope allows jumpers to make choices for jumping along a range of heights.

As a class engages in this event, I work with each student to focus on developing a consistent technique to maximize their effort. I used a video camera this year to record many class sessions. I used the playback with classes to observe their performances in real time, slow motion, frame by frame, freeze frame, and in reverse. We enjoyed watching the playback and it was a helpful tool for analyzing form, take-off point, and technique. The power, awareness, control, and the experience of flight combined to make the Dual Jump a peak experience for many students and an opportunity to measure personal physical prowess.

## MINI-COURSES

(insert picture here—caption: The Cross-Country Mini Course takes a break and is inspired by one of southeast Pennsylvania's oldest trees in the Andorra Natural Area)

The fall mini-course was Cross-Country Running and Hiking with Bill Northcutt and Diana Saraga. Each week, we ran/hiked a section of the Wissahickon trail system (including Forbidden Drive, connecting loops, and trails across the creek from Forbidden Drive. The group selected a favorite loop that we repeated toward the end of the course. This was a highlight and will be offered again in the upcoming school year. It was interesting how often we ran into (not literally) old friends, parents, alums, etc. on one of our runs.

The energy and excitement of the group as we took off on a trail was wonderful. I looked forward to each session. My most vivid memory of the bonding that took place on these experiences was of three 6<sup>th</sup> grade girls, Emma Ebert, Ashley Etheredge, and Annie Morrissey, running in perfect rhythm, stride for stride, talking, laughing and breathing in the crisp fall air. Perfect.

I did not have a course during the winter term. However, I was fortunate to observe, hang-out, and marvel at master juggler Sara Felder and her Juggling Mini-Course. As the weeks progressed, so did the skill and imagination of the members of this course. A

juggling assembly was presented to the entire school by Sara and her students. It was an inspiration to many. I ordered some juggling supplies, and Kit Wallace (who assisted Sara) donated a collection of juggling balls. A juggling station became a part of many P.E. classes! Thank you Sara.

In the spring Dylan Badawy and Sam Agre convinced me to sponsor a Soccer Mini-Course. They were the leaders of the course, organizing drills, skills, and thrills. I supplied pumped-up soccer balls, scrimmage vests, and advice. We had twenty-six participants representing all grades and groups. Players worked to develop their individual skills, game awareness, knowledge of rules, and fitness. Dylan and Sam tried to keep everyone involved and help each individual improve as a soccer player. The games at the end of each session were active. I believe that the participants had a good experience. Goal!

### CONFERENCE WEEKS

I worked with Jeri during the November conference week (Joan & Jeri's 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>). The class theme for the year was POWER. Jeri and I planned activities that included this theme, games to help develop class identity, and a few service projects on campus. We used "new" games and adventure-based activities that allowed the group to experience both personal physical power and the power of a group. One highlight was learning to work together to become a Trust Fall Team. The group also worked together to groom our snow tubing hill and spread wood chips for Kit.

I worked with Katie during the March conference week (Rich & Katie's 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup>). Katie and I planned activities around the group's daily schedule. The highlights were daily whole group gym class, a half-day hike in the Wissahickon (from Bell's Mill Road to the Indian Statue and back), and a movie and popcorn (on the final afternoon before spring break). During the whole group gym times, we played a number of games with the large parachute.

As a specialist, conference weeks are a valuable opportunity to engage in the "homeroom" culture and daily pace of a group of students. I get to interact with students on their turf, feel welcomed as a guest teacher, and enjoy lunch time conversations.

### AFFIRMATION

I continue to be inspired by the definition of a physically educated human being as stated by The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE). The definition states that a physically educated student:  
"HAS learned the skills necessary to perform a variety of physical activities;  
DOES participate regularly in physical activity;  
IS physically fit;  
KNOWS the implications of and benefits from involvement in physical activities;  
VALUES physical activity and its contributions to a healthful lifestyle."

Personally, the ability to express my physical nature on a daily basis is central to my harmony. I am fortunate to be able to witness and play a role in the many expressions of our children's physical natures and to work in an outdoor environment that supports our meaningful work and play.