



The Phantom Period: Investigating the Structural Disappearance of Physical Training in Indian School Timetables

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Abstract – Indian schools have a peculiar status in the national education system about Physical Training. It is explicitly included on every official timetable, required by curriculum frameworks, and by national policy documents, but is inconsistently delivered in classrooms and not at all delivered in some classrooms. This article aims to look at the structural aspects of how the PT period gets cancelled, converted and is informally hijacked in the schools across India. It looks at why physical education has become marginalized in the history of schooling from colonial times to the present day, explores the institutional drivers that enable this marginalization to continue, and examines the public health implications for those students who don't have physical education in their school timetables. The discussion is based on a study of the national survey on childhood obesity, myopia and adolescent mental health and policy documents such as the National Education Policy 2020 and the guidelines of the Fit India Movement. The article suggests a structural model to safeguard the PT slot, as evidenced in staffing redundancy, curricular design, outcome measurement and accountability mechanisms with parents and students. The core message is that the lack of physical education in Indian schools cannot be ascribed to chance, but to the incentives of each of the stakeholders, which systematically downplayed the importance of movement relative to classroom teaching – and that this is only reversible through deliberate institutional design, not goodwill.

Keywords: Physical Education, Indian Schools, PT Period, Curriculum Neglect, Childhood Fitness, Education Policy, School Reform, Student Wellbeing.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a particular scenario that plays itself out in classrooms in India, almost weekly. The bell signalling the beginning of the Physical Training period rings. Students rapidly grow, some already in white shoes that indicate that they are ready for the field. There's a little bit of a rise in collective energy, which doesn't happen during a normal school transition. Then comes a teacher, usually the math or science teacher, with a book in his hand, not a whistle. The welcome call is heard as usual. Physical Training teacher is not available. This time will be utilized to finish a chapter that is still in progress, or to take a brief test or to take notes. The class sits back down in their seats, and the field outside is deserted.

This is a common enough phenomenon that is known to all students, regardless of geography, school board or income. It is a part of the common school experience of Indians. But despite being so common, it's not something that's been taken seriously from an institutional perspective. Physical education is still a requirement in national policy documents. The inclusion of PT periods on official timetables is continuing to be checked by school inspections. There is ongoing parental expectation that children are getting structured movement throughout the school day. There is a lack of reflection on the difference between policy and classroom praxis.

The Disappearing PT Period: Structural Gaps in Indian School Physical Education

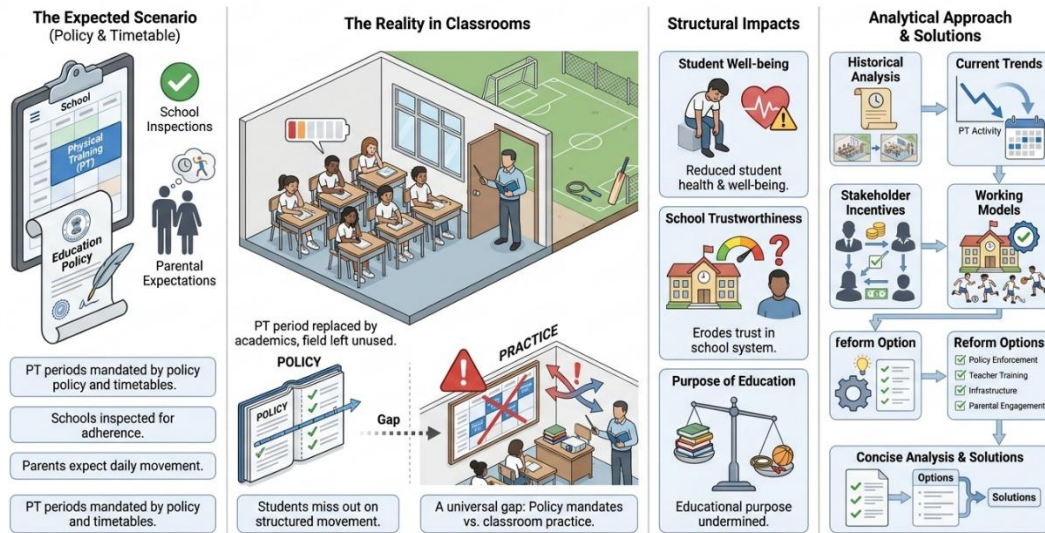


Fig -1: Structural Gaps in Indian School Physical Education

However, this article aims to fill that gap. It claims that the regular vanishing of the PT period is not just an administrative inconvenience, but a structural problem that has tangible effects on the well-being of students, the trustworthiness of schools, and the broader purpose of schools. It unfolds based on a historical analysis, an assessment of current trends, an analysis of incentives for stakeholders, an assessment of working models and a presentation of practical reform options. The purpose is to offer a concise analysis, as well as solutions that can be used.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This article's research is motivated by five main objectives. The first is to provide a documentation and characterisation of this phenomenon of the missing PT period, that goes beyond anecdotal observation to a structural understanding of it as it unfolds across Indian schools. The second is to locate the historical, economic, and cultural factors which have permitted physical education to be a low priority in Indian school administration. The third is to review scientific literature concerning the measurable effects of lack of physical exercise in childhood, as discussed in the literature of public health, pediatrics, and educational psychology. The fourth is to review schools and school systems where physical training is working well, to draw out lessons for schools wanting to change. The fifth and most practical goal is to build a viable blueprint which all actors schools, parents, students, and policy makers can leverage to reinvigorate the PT period. These goals, in confluence, move the discussion from a complaint mindset to a design mindset. The author views the absence of the PT period as a diagnostic tool of the relative importance of the various types of student growth that schools in India have placed.

3. A BRIEF HISTORY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN INDIAN SCHOOLS

This account of physical training in Indian schooling must be read in the context of the wider history of the creation of the modern Indian school. The prevailing model of formal education in India was developed

during the colonial era when it was in vogue and according to the concerns of the British government. The 1835 Macaulay Minute and the following education policies emphasised the need to create clerks, administrators, and English speaking professionals to assist colonial administration. In this context, physical development was not completely ignored but was subordinate. The schools based on the template gave priority to learning that required sitting, writing, and reciting, and to which sports and drills were an ancillary element.

A Brief History of Physical Education in Indian Schools

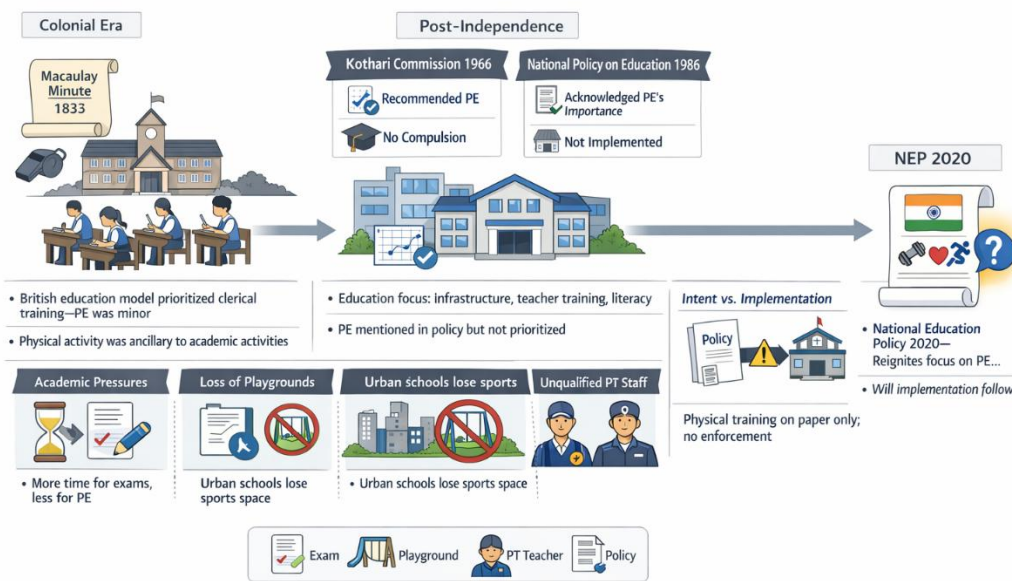


Fig -2: A Brief History of Physical Education in Indian Schools

This academic structure was carried over to the new Indian state after independence in 1947. In the initial stages of the growth of education, the emphasis was on school construction, teacher training, and the promotion of literacy. Physical education was mentioned in policy documents but often did not get the budgets or institutional status that were afforded to academic subjects. The report of Kothari Commission of 1966 enunciated the significance of PE, however, it failed to include any rigid system to make it compulsory and mandatory. Similar sentiments were reflected in the National Policy on Education 1986 but there was no attempt to bridge the gap between the policy level and implementation level.

During the next few decades, three more factors contributed to the marginalisation of physical training. The first was the culture of board exams that got intensified with every minute of the academic period being considered a preparation minute, especially in the case of Class 10 and Class 12 exams. The second was the 'urbanisation' of Indian cities and the gradual loss of playgrounds with the passage of time, especially in the private schools located in the urban centres. The third was the lack of professionalism of the PT Instructor. Teacher training colleges turned out to be a regular stream of qualified math, science, and language teachers, but there was not many physical education professionals trained in the colleges, nor did these institutions receive adequate funding. Many schools employed one part-time PT teacher, sometimes unqualified in PE, thus making the whole subject a liability when one teacher decided to take a

vacation. The net result of these forces was a system in which physical training was 'delivered' on paper only because of the regulatory frameworks and actual delivery was done without enforcement, measurement, or institutional consequences if it was not delivered. The National Education Policy 2020 has tried to reignite interest in this field, by playing sports, fitness, and physical wellbeing as a part of the whole education process. It is an open question whether this policy intention is realised at school level in terms of the structures that are put in place.

4. CURRENT TRENDS IN INDIAN SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The contemporary image of P.E. in Indian schools is one of great diversity from one type of school to another, and of several superimposed tendencies which have increased in intensity during the past decade.

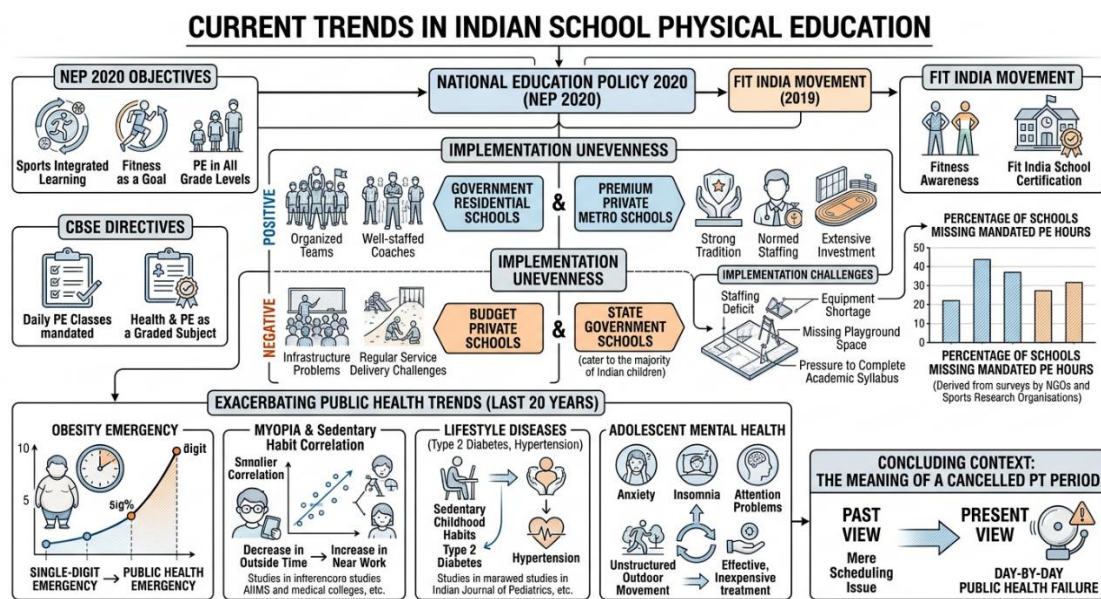


Fig -3: Current Trends in Indian School Physical Education

The National Education Policy 2020 is the most ambitious recent effort to reimagine the role of physical activity in the school. Sports integrated learning, fitness and making physical education a part of all grade levels are explicit mentions in the policy. In 2019, the Government of India introduced the Fit India Movement which aimed at inculcating fitness awareness in schools and public institutions. The Fit India School Certification programme has inspired school to record and showcase the physical education infrastructure in schools. Circulars have been issued by the Central Board of Secondary Education mandating daily Physical education classes and Health and Physical education has been made a graded subject in the upper primary and secondary classes.

In terms of implementation, the situation is a lot more uneven. A significant percentage of Indian schools have been identified to be missing out on the number of hours of PE that are required in their school timetables through various surveys carried out by sports research organisations and education NGOs. Staffing, equipment, space for playground and pressure to complete academic syllabus are the reasons mentioned. The difference is very well related to the type of school. In the case of central government



schools, which are mostly residential or semi residential schools, these schools have a stronger tradition of PE, in part due to their structured norms of staffing. Private schools in metropolitan areas frequently have extensive investments in sports facilities and hire coaches. Budget private schools and many government schools in the States are facing problems with infrastructure and regular delivery of services, which cater to most Indian children.

A few trends have exacerbated this situation. Indian urban childhood obesity rates have significantly increased in the last twenty years, and several studies have been reported in Indian Journal of Pediatrics, Indian Journal of Endocrinology and Metabolism, which has gone from a single digit problem to a double digit public health emergency. The increase in myopia (the decline in distance vision) has been a similar upward curve in school children, and this has been consistently correlated with a decrease in their time outside and an increase in near work. The All India Institute of Medical Sciences, along with a number of medical colleges in the country, have released studies which link lifestyle diseases like type two diabetes and hypertension to sedentary childhood habits. Adolescent mental health providers have reported increased anxiety, insomnia, and attention problems among adolescents, and have consistently found that unstructured outdoor movement is one of the most effective and inexpensive treatments available. In this context of policy aspiration and concern for public health, the day-to-day experience of the non-existence of the PT period has gained new meaning. Where once it was viewed merely as a scheduling issue, it is now a public health failure that takes place day by day for every cancelled period.

5. THE ANATOMY OF THE HIJACK

To comprehend the disappearance of the PT period constantly, it is necessary to look at the little institutional theatre that creates this disappearance. It is very consistent across schools and would be hard to account for in terms of individual teacher behaviour. It reflects a structural design in which it is easy and rational for the actors to hijack the period.

First is administrative priority. Indian school administrators are also under tremendous pressure to show academic results, especially in the classes that are taking the board exams. As a syllabus deadline approaches, an academic chapter isn't finished, or an internal assessment must take place, the timetable needs to squeeze the extra time in somewhere. The PT period is the least institutional resistant slot. A board examination does not weigh as heavily on physical fitness as does a written paper. Complaints about a child not having a running session will not be raised in a parent meeting. No Head will be asked to explain themselves as Head of Chemistry to a school inspector for setting a priority on a chemistry chapter over playtime.

The second one is the following script. The hijack often is a result of the absence of explicit cancellation of the PT period. Rather, an academic teacher comes with a textbook, stating that the PT instructor is not available and starts using the time as an academic teaching opportunity. The unspoken message is that time is already gone, and the academic teacher is putting it to good use in an otherwise vacant time slot. This framing puts the moral burden on the cancellation. The PT period is viewed as a gap that needs to be filled, not as a right that needs to be preserved.

The third, and most harmful factor, is student adaptation. After many exposures to this pattern, the students no longer anticipate the PT period. Disappointment becomes defused. The energy that sparks a PT slot in the beginning is subdued and ultimately lost. This cultured acceptance is most damaging. It

helps students understand that the timetable is not a schedule binding on institutions, but a guideline and that scheduled activities, such as physical activity, may be displaced by any academic priority.

THE ANATOMY OF THE PT PERIOD HIJACK: A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF DISAPPEARANCE IN SCHOOLS

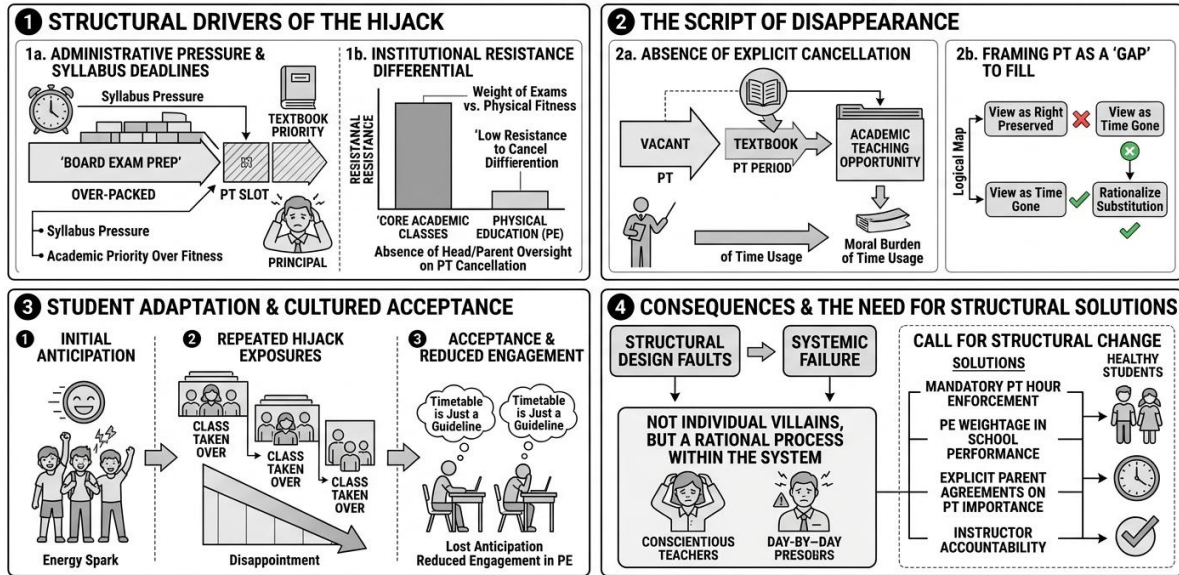


Fig -4: The Anatomy of the PT Period Hijack

It's not the work of villains, the hijack. When the mathematics teacher comes in with his textbook, he's probably a conscientious teacher who is really under syllabus pressure. The principal who grants permission for the substitution may be juggling limited staff and examination requirements. The structure is the one that brings about the result whatever the goodwill of individual participants. This is why a structural solution is also needed.

6. THE REAL COSTS NOBODY ADDS UP

The lost hour of a PT period isn't the only way to measure the loss. It can be built up over thousands of cancelled sessions during a school career and can be manifested in physical, psychological and institutional aspects, not normally visible on any school report card.

The physical dimension is the most reported. The pressure of school, tuition, entertainment with screens and homework makes today's Indian children spend more sedentary hours that any generation of children before them. Several studies have been published in Indian and international journals which have proved that childhood obesity in urban India has reached proportions of a public health emergency as termed by the pediatricians. Data released by the Indian Council of Medical Research and the National Institute of Nutrition have revealed that indicators of lifestyle diseases, such as blood pressure, fasting glucose and body mass index have started to occur in children at ages where such issues were previously uncommon. Although there is no universal definition of refractive errors, the prevalence of myopia in school children has reached levels that ophthalmologists believe have been linked to not getting enough natural light outdoors; which is where scheduled outdoor PT periods come into play.

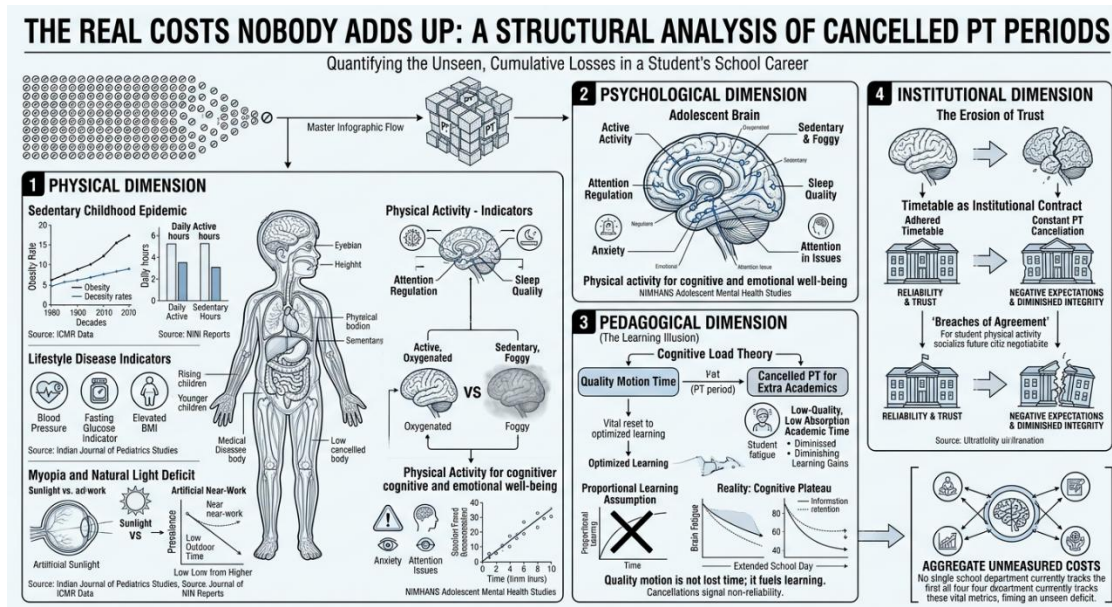


Fig -5: A Structural Analysis of Cancelled PT Periods

The Psychological aspect is not measurable, but increasingly recognised. Studies on adolescent mental health like the study by National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Bengaluru have correlated the benefits of physical activity on measurable changes in attention, mood regulation, and sleep quality. The rigorous academic timetables of Indian students have very little movement time left outside of school, and the PT period is one of the few consistent periods when students can have the type of physical activity that is conducive to cognitive and emotional wellbeing. That time, when regularly cancelled, is lost throughout the school year.

The pedagogical dimension is all too frequently not considered at all. Schools that use a cancel PT time to add math or science do so because they assume that using an extra 40 minutes of math or science means that they will get proportional learning gains. Research on learning outcomes has found that this is incorrect. Research by cognitive load and attention studies suggests that additional learning time (especially when a student is tired or placed at the end of a long day or during an unexpected break), is unlikely to generate significant learning gains. It's not "school is out for summer. It's quality motion time, in exchange for low-quality, low absorption academic time. This is usually implicitly known by both teacher and student, while the system affects to believe the substitution is productive.

The stealthiest is the institutional aspect. If students' experiences of the timetable are that it is not adhered to, they develop a negative expectation of school reliability. The timetable is the simplest contract that a school has with its students and defines what will happen and when. Constant and continual breaches of that agreement, especially if it goes that way every time when the school's convenience is paramount, indicate to students that institutional pledges are negotiable depending on institutional strength. This lesson continues with their adult interactions with employers, public service and civic buildings. These expenses are very real. They simply aren't aggregated no one single department of any school is responsible for measuring them.

7. WHY SCHOOLS GET AWAY WITH IT

Sometimes, it is a matter of will or imagination on the part of school administrators that the missing PT period is still there. What's really being said is that the system produces a stable equilibrium of stakeholder incentives that is such that no stakeholder has a clear enough advantage in reform that he or she can choose to lead the way, and multiple stakeholders have an advantage in inertia.

WHY SCHOOLS GET AWAY WITH IT: A STABLE EQUILIBRIUM OF INERTIA

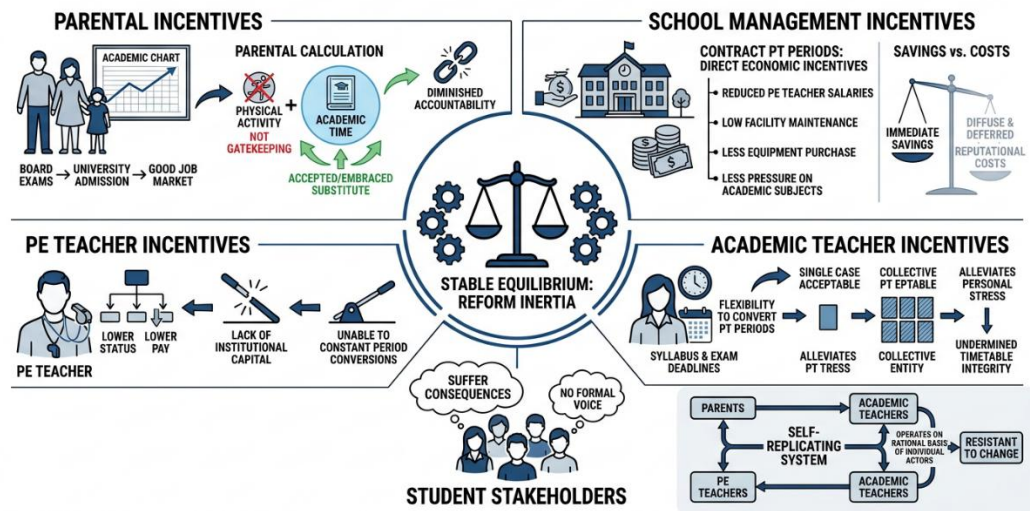


Fig -6: A Stable Equilibrium of Inertia

Competitive urban markets tend to lead parents to prefer more time in the classroom. The implicit calculation is that those that do well at exams are admitted to university, those that are admitted to university get good jobs, and physical activity is good (in principle) but not part of the gatekeeping process at either exam or university level. Many parents would not object to being stealthily replaced by academic time. Some would embrace it. This parental attitude takes away what would be the most natural accountability for the school.

School managements have direct economic incentives related to the contraction of PT periods. There is the actual cost of employing qualified physical education teachers, of developing and maintaining sporting facilities, of buying the equipment and of ensuring that time is maintained for physical education, free from pressure from academic subjects. But canceling or cutting back on these investments generates immediate savings and only diffuse and deferred reputational costs. The flexibility to convert PT periods provides operational flexibility for academic teachers, especially for those teaching subjects that have exams. Extra time for chapters that are behind alleviates the personal stress of chapter deadlines. This flexibility, although acceptable as a single case, is not acceptable as a collective entity as it makes the integrity of the timetable undermined.

The PE teacher is not normally well placed to 'defend' their domain. They tend to be paid less than academic faculty, to be accorded informal lower status within a school hierarchy and to have fewer career mobility options. But to counteract the constant period conversions, the institutional capital is needed, which many PT instructors simply lack. It is the only system in which students are the only stakeholders who suffer as a result of the system, and the only stakeholders who do not have formal voice

in the governance of schools. All the stakeholder incentives result in a self-replicating system which does not need any conspiracy to repeat itself. It operates on the rational basis of the individual actors, in the same way that it is resistant to change.

8. WHAT A WORKING PT SYSTEM ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE

When the PT period is introduced in the schools it's a failure because of the idea that it will not work in India. Patterns are quite similar, and functional models are available. As you learn more about them, you will discover that the key to a successful or unsuccessful PE class isn't necessarily resources, it is design.

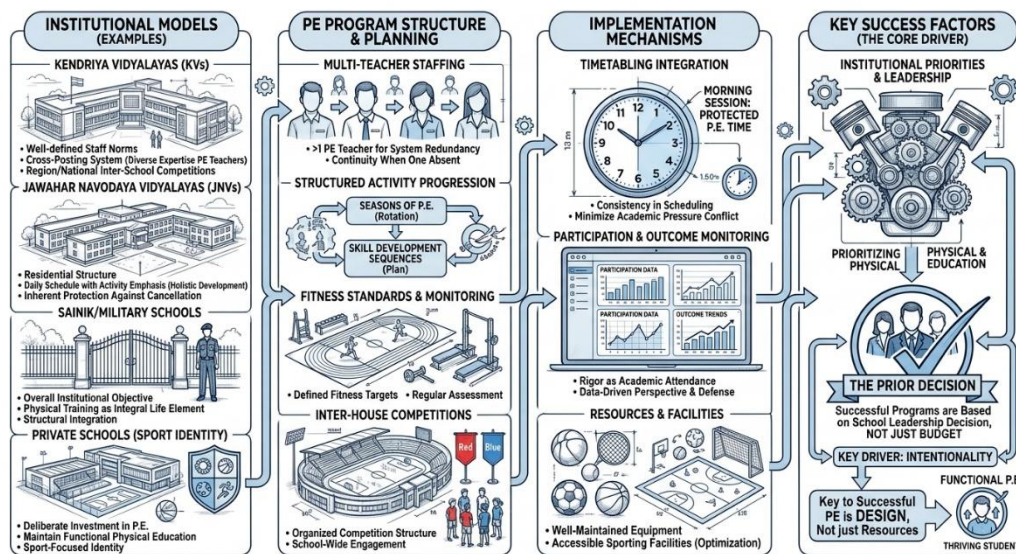


Fig -7: Working PT System Actually Looks

Kendriya Vidyalayas throughout the country have a well-developed physical education programme, with their well-defined staff norms, cross posting system where physical education teachers with diverse sports experience are brought in, and tradition of region and national level inter school competitions. The residential nature of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas and the holistic development with the emphasis of activities in the daily schedule make it difficult from structural point of view to cancel physical training activities. Physical training is an integral part of the students' life in Sainik Schools and Rashtriya Military Schools due to their overall objective. Deliberate investment by several private schools, especially those with an identity around sport, is able to maintain functional physical education.

A few common trends are enlightening. They have more than one Physical Education teacher so that when one teacher is absent it doesn't break the system. They ensure PE is timetabled in consistent, protected time, often in the morning when students' energy levels are high and other pressure seems to be at a minimum. They monitor participation and outcomes as rigorously as they monitor academic attendance, and the result is data to help put the time into perspective and make it defensible. They plan their PE programme in a way that is organised through a progression of sporting activities with the seasons of PE rotated, fitness standards are set, inter house competitions are organised, and sequences of activities to develop skills are planned this provides internal structure to the PE period and does not allow it to be used as a generic free time. The real message here is that there is a key factor that all

successful P.E. programmes have and it isn't budget. These indicate institutional priorities to seriously consider the subject. School leadership has decided to make physical training work where it does. Where it does not, it does not because school leaders often informally, without ever expressing the decision have decided that it does not finally matter. Resources help, but do not take the place of this prior decision.

9. A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR FIXING THE PT PERIOD

To fix the structural failure of physical training schools don't need large budgets or outside intervention. The reform needed is design oriented and most of the elements of the reform can be done using existing staff and infrastructure. The framework that is proposed here has five interdependent components.

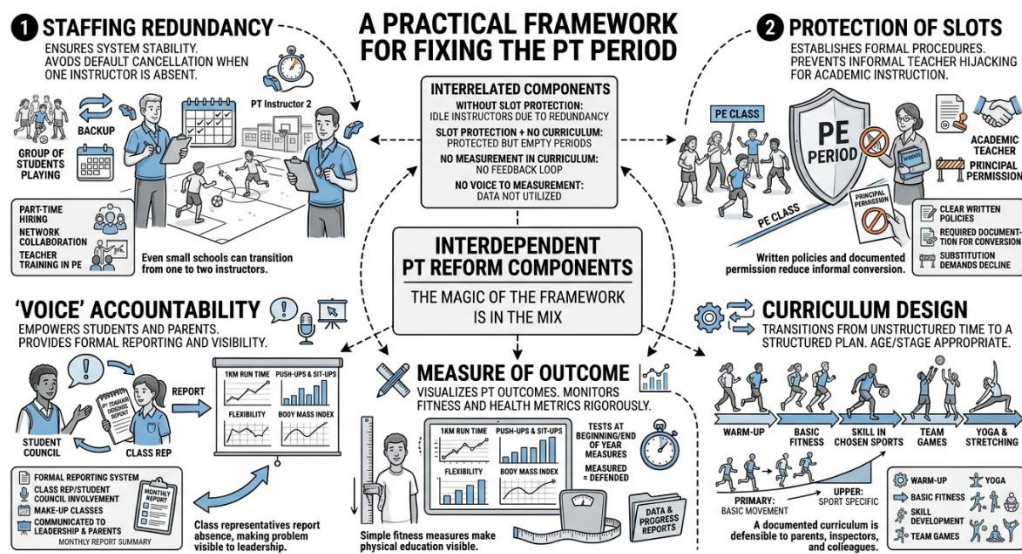


Fig -8: A Practical Framework for Fixing the PT Period

The first one is staffing redundancy. No subject in any school should be reliant on one member of staff and that is most often the case for PE. Even relatively small schools can transition from one to two PT instructors, which could be achieved through part time hiring, collaborative roles among school in the same network, or by providing physical education delivery training to one or two current teachers. The goal is to make it so that if one person isn't there then there isn't a default cancellation. The most common 'operational' reason for hijacking the period is taken care of by redundancy alone.

The second is the protection of slots. Schools should have clear written policies that unless specifically granted in writing by the principal the PE period cannot be used for academic instruction and any such permission should be recorded and subject to review. The issues of procedure alone decreases the informal teacher decision making that presently occurs in the casual conversion process. Several schools that have settled for such regulations claim that the numbers of substitution demands fall off dramatically when they are asked for documentation.

The third aspect is the design of the curriculum. Don't consider PE as time to send students out to a field for unstructured time. It should consist of a structured plan based on a curriculum which incorporates warm up, basic fitness, skill in chosen sports, team games and yoga and planned stretching. The curriculum should be age/stage appropriate and take a developmental approach, starting in primary



grades with basic movement skills and then progressing to sport specific skills and fitness training in the upper grades. Having a documented curriculum renders it more defensible to parents, inspectors and to academic colleagues and provides a clear professional remit for instructors.

The fourth is the measure of outcome. Academic outcomes are evidenced by tests, term assessments, and report cards. The outcomes of physical education are seldom monitored, thus making physical education invisible. At the beginning and end of each school year, simple, inexpensive one kilometer run time, number of push-ups and sit-ups, flexibility measures and basic body mass index measurements can be taken. The information needn't be advanced. It needs to exist. What gets measured gets defended and one of the major reasons why physical education is not administered is because it is not measured!

The fifth element is 'voice' accountability. There should be a formal system in place in which class representatives or student council members report absence of PE teachers, just as other teachers are reported, and the class should be made up for. This reporting process should not be one that is punitive. It is used mainly to print out the cancellation. When a month-by-month summary is made of actual versus scheduled physical education and communicated to school leadership and parent representatives, the problem of attrition becomes visible and turns into a problem of actual performance.

All five of these elements are interrelated. Without slot protection, there are idle instructors due to redundancy. When slot protection is given without curriculum design, then you have protected but empty periods. There is no feedback without measurement in curriculum design. If there's no voice to measurement, there is no reading of data. The magic of the framework is in the mix.

10. WHAT PARENTS AND STUDENTS CAN DO NOW

However, it will take time to reform the PT period at the institutional level, and individual students cannot wait for the reform to have an impact in their school years. The above-mentioned framework represents "what schools should be doing." Whether or not schools cooperate, there are things stakeholders can do, which are described below:

There is much more leverage than parents use. Parent teacher meetings are usually about marking or revision, behaviour and progress and PE is not often discussed. The institutional signal is changed by parents who regularly ask certain questions with respect to physical training. Some questions are how many PT periods were run last term as compared to the number planned, qualifications of the physical education teacher, what was taught during PT periods and what were the fitness outcomes of the cohort. Schools answer the questions that are repeatedly asked and the lack of such questions goes a long way toward the invisibility of the issue. Parent associations that have physical education on their agenda as a formal item of business have long-term impact which is not possible with individual queries from parents.

While institutional changes are underway, students (and especially those in higher grades) can develop a culture of physical activity on their own. Thirty minutes of walking, cycling or serious sports a day will make up for the majority of what would have been accomplished by a missed PT period. This can be a simple activity. Must be consistent. The psychological advantage of independent practice is the individual who has learned to take care of his own physical health is not dependent on others for the maintenance of his health and carries this independence with him to adult life.

There is a very easy experiment that school leaders can start with when they consider the possibility of reform. Pick one term. Do not make exceptions, conversions or substitutions during the PT period. Monitor energy, behaviour of students, attendance of students, even focus in the classroom during surrounding

periods. The data speaks for itself to make the argument. Schools that have conducted such trials have frequently reported additional benefits on academic engagement as a result of safeguarding the PT period active movers are more attentive than stayers.

WHAT PARENTS AND STUDENTS CAN DO NOW: INTERIM PT SOLUTIONS

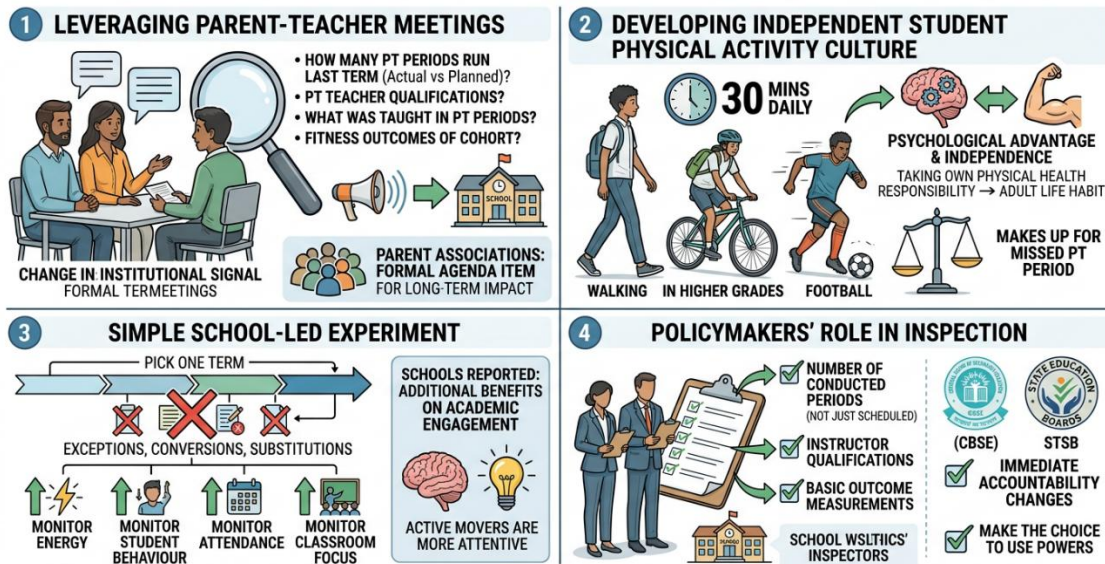


Fig -9: Interim PT Solutions

Education boards and policymakers have a part to play. When PT periods are checked in the inspection of the schools, where they are present on official timetables, the problem is not found. Inspections where the number of conducted periods compared to the scheduled periods as well as instructor qualifications and basic outcome measurements is documented would result in immediate accountability changes. Both the Central Board of Secondary Education and the State education boards have the powers to bring this change. All that is needed is to make the choice to use them.

II. THE PROFESSIONAL ECOSYSTEM OF THE PHYSICAL EDUCATION INSTRUCTOR

It is important that any serious consideration of the failure of physical training in Indian schools should include that of the professional status of those who teach physical training. As described in the previous sections, the physical education teacher is in a structurally weak position in the Indian school, and this is partly because of the phenomenon itself as well as a result of it.

Training of Physical Education Professionals in India is imbalanced. A few institutes offer Bachelor of Physical Education and Master of Physical Education programmes, out of which the Lakshmbai National Institute of Physical Education, Gwalior stands as the oldest institute. The various state universities have parallel courses of varying quality. The output of qualified graduates annually is considerably less than the number that is needed to man Indian schools in the proportion indicated by the National policy. Because of this deficiency, schools are forced to resort to part-time employment, informal placements, and sometimes even to place physical education responsibilities in the hands of other teachers who may not be qualified in physical education.

The Professional Ecosystem of the Physical Education Instructor

Marginalisation and Reform of PT Professionals in Indian Schools
A Multi-Dimensional Analysis

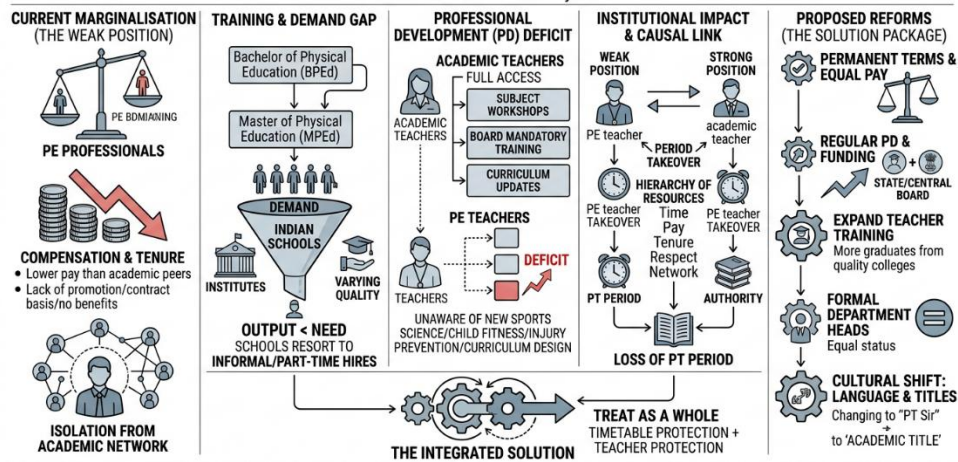


Fig -10: The Professional Ecosystem of the Physical Education Instructor

The marginalisation is supported by the compensation patterns. In many private schools, physical education teachers are paid less than their academic peers who have a similar number of years of experience. There are not many promotion channels. The position of subject head, which is typical of a subject in schools, is uncommon in PE. Many teachers are on contract or on part time basis for long periods of time and do not enjoy the benefits of providing fund, gratuity and other employment related benefits that permanent teachers enjoy. The further lack of structured continuing education undermines the professional identity of the physical education teacher. Academic teachers participate in subject specific workshops, mandatory training sessions organized by the board and sessions for curriculum updates. Professional development is provided significantly less for physical education teachers. School Level practitioners may be unaware of new techniques and methodologies in sports science, child fitness, injury prevention, and curriculum design.

This deficit in the professional environment for PE has an institutional impact as PE teachers do not have the respect to stand up for themselves when academic teachers want to take over PE lessons. A part-timer (or lower paid teacher, for that matter) who is isolated professionally will always be at risk from a permanent, higher paid, professionally networked academic colleague. All the authority is a function of the hierarchy of resources, and that hierarchy of resources determines which periods survive and which ones don't. Thus, physical education can be reformed only if the role of the physical education teacher is redefined. There are several measures that would improve this position. Teachers of physical education need to be included on permanent terms, and the pay scales need to be set at the same level as other teachers with similar level of experience. Regular PD should be provided to PE staff with funding from state and central education boards. The teacher training colleges should be expanded in terms of seats in PE and quality of the programme. Schools that have several physical education teachers should establish formal department head positions with equal status and recognition as academic department heads.

This reform has also a cultural aspect. This diminishment of the physical education teacher as "PT sir" instead of by their academic title, is implicit and not experienced by academic teachers. If schools are to raise the profile of PE, they must raise the profile of those that deliver it, and one of the ways they can do this is to pay attention to the little linguistic and ceremonial cues that denote professional status.

What that really means is that any institutional change must fail if it sees the PE teacher as a "cog in the machine". The responsibility for protecting the curriculum and teaching the periods, assessing the outcomes, and communicating with parents and students lies with the teacher. Timetable Protection without Teacher Protection will yield protected slots without professional support. A curriculum reform agenda that doesn't develop the capacity of instructors will yield documents that no one can implement. The loss of a PT period and the marginalisation of the PT teacher are two sides of the same coin. A solution to either one alone results in partial or temporary improvement. The solution lies in treating them as a package, to achieve any lasting reform.

12. FUTURE PROSPECTS

The mix of different forces will affect the future of physical education in Indian schools. That interaction can go either way and there is a valuable opportunity for reform during this current period.

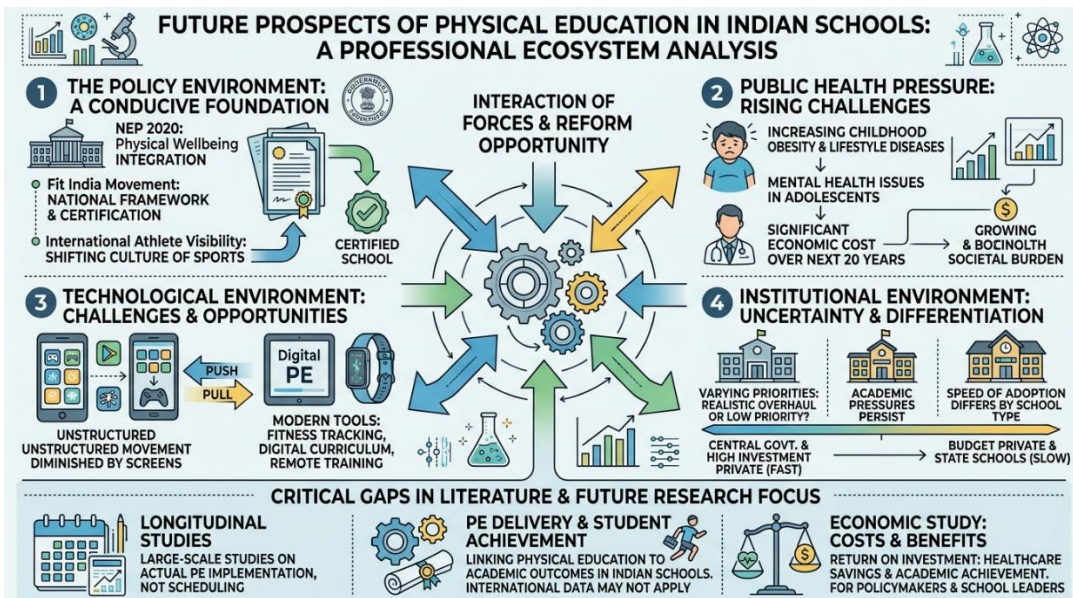


Fig -11: Future Prospects of Physical Education in Indian Schools

The policy environment is more conducive than ever in the past few decades. The NEP 2020 has clearly established text in its policy that Physical wellbeing will be integrated into mainstream schooling. The Fit India Movement has developed a national framework to which schools can join and get certified and recognised. The greater visibility of Indian athletes on the international stage has led to some changes in culture of sports as a realm of profession and development.

Pressure is being exerted from the other side the public health environment. As childhood obesity, markers of lifestyle diseases and mental health issues in adolescents are steadily increasing, the problem has started to receive attention from medical practitioners, public health researchers and now concerned parents. The economic cost of these trends, over the next 20 years, is significant, and policy responses are likely to get tougher, whatever the education reform priorities are.

Technological environment brings challenges and opportunities. Unstructured movement time for children is even further diminished by the increasing use of screen based entertainment and digital



learning platforms. Meanwhile, schools have tools that were not available in previous reform efforts, such as fitness tracking devices, structured digital PE curriculum, and training resources remotely available. The institutional environment has the most uncertainty. But it is not clear if Indian schools will take the policy and public health initiative seriously and use it to realistically overhaul physical education or it will remain as a low priority subject which is subject to academic pressures. The answer, probably, will differ depending on the type of school, with the central government schools and high investment private schools going the quickest, and the mass of budget private schools and many of the state schools moving slower.

There are several gaps in the literature that should be the focus of future research in this field. First, there are few large scale longitudinal studies of the actual implementation of PE in Indian school, rather than its scheduling. Second, research linking physical education delivery and student achievement in Indian schools is too limited and underdeveloped, and research done internationally isn't necessarily applicable in Indian schools. Third, there is a need for an economic study of the costs and benefits of investing in PE such as return on investment in healthcare saving and academic achievement, which would be of benefit to policy makers and school leaders. These research gaps would enhance the potential for reform and for assessing the effectiveness of different interventions.

13. CONCLUSION

The removal of the Physical Training period from Indian school classrooms is no coincidence. It is the logical consequence of a system where incentives of the different stakeholders are not aligned towards protecting physical activity. Parents are more concerned about the examination results. Managing costs is a priority for school managements. Academic teachers focus on covering syllabus. PE teachers are not strong within the institution to protect the domain. The only constant casualties, students, have no formal say. The consequence is a once a week, contrived, and completely unrepresented subject that's written about and used as a crutch in school.

The price of this arrangement can be measured. It is seen in the rise of childhood obesity, in the increasing number of children with myopia, in adolescent mental health indicators, and even in the fading of student trust for institutional commitments. The work is not a complicated fix, but it is one that is structural. This takes staffing redundancy, slot protection, curriculum design, outcome measurement and accountability through student and parent voice. None of these elements could have a lot of new investment. Each of them demands institutional commitment to take physical education seriously. Childhood is brief. Time for structured movement, outdoor time, free play in the years where the body and mind are still malleable does not come back. It was left to the schools to provide this and in most cases, responsibility has been neglected. Probably, naming failure is the initial step to fix! The PT period has always been the straight period. The joke was to grin and bear it, rather than demand to have it returned.

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