

EDITORIAL

Four hours of physical education in the schools of Romania Patru ore de educație fizică în școlile din România

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On 8 March 2013, the Romanian Government officially announced its intention to increase the number of physical education hours in secondary and high schools starting with the school year 2012/2013. The increase in the number of physical education hours to 4 hours a week is proposed to be gradually introduced, starting with the 5th and 10th grades (1).

The reports of the bodies habilitated to promote population health show a low level of the Romanian population's health. The high percentage of the incidence of obesity, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes is alarming. Obesity has reached alarming rates worldwide as a result of two main causes: increase of a sedentary lifestyle and unhealthy nutrition. At European level, the Sports Commission has made recommendations to member states for increasing the number of physical education hours, as a measure for fighting sedentary lifestyles.

We have discussed before in the pages of this journal, including in editorials, aspects related to the health of the young population (pupils, students). The conclusions have always evidenced the need for promoting educational measures aimed at encouraging the systematic/regular practice of physical activities, as part of the development of a lifestyle in favor of health. We have shown that systematic exercise practice according to the general perception means the performance of moderate exercise at least 3 days a week, with a conventional duration ranging between 30 and 90 minutes (***, 2007; Bocu, 2011). We remind the fact that in education, time is measured in teaching hours of 50 minutes, followed by breaks of 10 minutes. In higher education, time is measured in double teaching hours, of 100 minutes.

The governmental offer that provides for the introduction in the curriculum of 4 hours of physical education a week was accompanied by the mention that 2 teaching hours will be joined together resulting in two longer classes, which in the opinion of the Ministry of Education would allow to make the best use of the time required for dressing up before the class and for the recovery of the organism after the physical education class. "This means

that the child will not attend physical education classes four times, but two times a week, especially since only about 25 minutes of a physical education hour are used. Because children need to change their clothes, warm up, start exercising, cool down, dress up and leave the sports hall without catching a cold. Two hours joined together will result in about 70 minutes of physical education" (3).

The initiative of the government is in agreement with a EU recommendation for European countries, which through a 2007 Directive proposes three physical education hours a week for all study levels and encourages the development of physical education that is not only based on sports competition, so as not to deter less physically fit pupils (2). To our knowledge, in these countries physical education hours are not joined together, ensuring in this way a minimum level required for the regular practice of weekly physical activities.

While there is no doubt about the beneficial effects of this initiative, its application would raise the following questions: if 1-2 classes of physical education per week have resulted in a percentage of physical education exemption estimated to be worrying, what will happen in the case of 4 classes per week? Can the framework plans and curricula be corrected within the limits of the current number of hours/week required by European norms so as to introduce the 4 hours of physical education without affecting the other classes? Is the joining of two hours together appropriate, under the conditions of which it is known that regular exercise practice requires 3-4 days/week? How will these classes take place in schools that do not have a sports hall or during winter? By whom and how will teachers be paid for these additional hours that will double the current number of hours?

The answers to these questions are predictable: it is obvious that an increase in the number of physical education hours should be paralleled by changes in the content of the curriculum, in order to make it accessible to pupils. Competitiveness as a form of motivation should be reduced during classes and the evaluation system should become interactive, allowing these changes to really stimulate the

pupils, including those that are less physically fit. A conflict between fundamental subjects and physical education might arise because the upper limits of the framework plans provided by the National Education Law (LEN), required by European norms, cannot be exceeded. Article 66 of LEN establishes, as a result of European recommendations and models, that the maximum number of hours allocated to disciplines in the education framework plans should be 20 hours a week for primary education, 25 hours a week for secondary education, and 30 hours a week for high school education, precisely for reducing the curriculum load. The hours are allocated for teaching and evaluation, as well as for the teacher-assisted learning of the taught content, according to LEN (***, 2011). This reduction in the load of framework plans is aimed at enabling pupils to perform extracurricular activities, including sports activities, complementary to the common core curriculum. The joining of two hours together will not have the expected effect. The number of classes per week will still be two, which will not ensure regular exercise practice. With this system, a sick pupil will not only miss one hour, but two hours at a time. In our opinion, 4 physical education classes 4 days a week will result in a greater benefit.

Therefore, we believe that the National Education Ministry should not be the only authority to assume the promotion of the school population's health by setting all the conditions for the practice of systematic physical activities. The collaboration with the Ministry of Health through the implementation of public health strategies, as well as with the National Sport Authority by applying the

recent provisions of the CSPS project financed by the EU in 2010-2011, is in our opinion the way to be followed for promoting the health of the young population, of pupils. According to this project, as a result of the decision of the European Commission to make health-promoting physical activity a milestone of its sport policies, sports clubs have received a sort of imperative mandate to get involved in the promotion of exercise for health. As part of this project, specialists and elite sport structures (i.e. school sports clubs) are recommended not to persist in their exclusive and detrimental attitude of acting only for the interest of those with a potential and wish to practice high performance sport (Dumitru, 2012).

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