

**House Education Committee
Testimony in Support of HB4923 & HB4924
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In my role as Vice President of Educational Programs for the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and the Michigan Fitness Foundation, I would like to thank the House Education Committee for holding hearings on these important bills related to health and physical education offerings in our schools. I am wholeheartedly in support of both of these bills; I specifically would like to address HB 4923 related to establishing minimum time requirements for physical education in our schools. It is a timely issue and a multitude of other states recently have passed legislation requiring more physical education in schools.

In June, The Trust for America's Health released their 2010 report titled "F as in Fat: How Obesity Threatens America's Future". Similar reports and calls to action come out almost monthly outlining the health and financial consequences of the obesity epidemic, which was declared by the U.S. Surgeon General back in 2001. Because of increasing obesity levels, our children are at increased risk for diabetes, heart disease, stroke, breast and colon cancer, and a plethora of other health problems. The consequences of this crisis are dire, including shortened life expectancies, reduced quality of life and additional burdens to health care costs that are already spiraling out of control for businesses and government.

If the health and financial consequences of obesity aren't enough to make us act, consider the education consequences. Obese children miss four times as much school as normal-weight children. They often suffer from depression, anxiety disorders, poor self-esteem, and bullying from their peers. A recent U of M study found those who were obese at high school graduation were more likely than others to be receiving welfare or unemployment at age 40. We cannot ignore the negative consequences that obesity has on learning; it is simply a disservice to our students NOT to educate the whole child.

When you look at position papers from the medical, public health, education, and business communities that address solutions to the obesity crisis, the large majority call for quality, daily physical education in our schools as a primary solution. In 2004,

a study commissioned by MEDC (i.e., the Altarum Report) found that Michigan's high rates of obesity, coronary heart disease, and diabetes are increasing healthcare costs and therefore healthcare premiums. Their number one recommendation was to redouble efforts to support health promotion and disease prevention, including language for enhancing physical education. In 2006, The Shape of the Nation Report was released by the American Heart Association and NASPE looking at the status of physical education in each state. The accompanying national press release headline was "*Michigan Among the Worst in the Nation for Physical Education Requirements.*"

It is clearly time to join other states in passing legislation related to physical education. We do not want to be among the worst, especially when it comes to the learning and health of our children and youth. Our current school code has no minimum requirements and does not address the quality of physical education offerings in our schools. Physical education programs need to be part of the regular school day and taught by certified physical education teachers.

Please know that quality physical education is much more than a place to merely run kids around. It is an important subject area that has content standards in which students learn the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors they need to grow into healthy, productive adults.

In addition to health issues, physical education is advantageous to academic learning. Ironically, when schools eliminate time for physical education, which our current law allows, thinking they will improve test scores and academic achievement, they are actually achieving the opposite. An increasing body of research indicates that physical activity, physical education and higher fitness scores are all related to higher academic performance.

I also strongly support the language in the bill that does NOT allow for substitution of other activities such as athletics or marching band for the physical education requirement. As already emphasized, instruction in physical education is an essential element of each student's learning and has educational value beyond mere bodily movement. Allowing for substitution would be equivalent to letting students substitute chess club for their math requirement, or letting students substitute the school play for their English requirement.

Thank you for your time in thoughtfully considering the importance of physical education (and health education) in the school curriculum. Together we can improve the health and learning outcomes of our students by supporting these subjects as part of the regular school day.