

Testimony for HB 516

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Thank you Delegate Walker and co-sponsors for proposing this bill; and Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington and the committee for your attention. I am here to strongly support Bill 516 as a former physical educator, a teacher of student elementary physical educators, a funded NIH researcher of motor development in children with and without movement disabilities and a Fellow of the National Academy of Kinesiology. I have three points to make.

First, the scientific evidence is clear about the physical and mental health benefits gained from the quantity of moderate exercise; but there are also benefits from the quality of movements. For example, studies now show that infants and young children with better motor skills tend to have better cognitive skills and also later in life^{1,2,3,4}. This means that movement quality as well as quantity can improve academic performance.

Second, this bill turns out to be really good because it combines both quantity of exercise through recess activity and quality of movement through physical education. Good elementary physical education involves developing quality fundamental motor skills as well as academic knowledge about how to be fit and why to value physical activity for their lifetime. There is considerable evidence that physically competent children are more likely to be physically active than those who are less competent^{5,6,7}.

Third, the barriers to implementation can be reduced. If physical education were to include academic knowledge and if recess can be structured to encourage the practice and exercise of motor skills then there is evidence^{8,9}, existing resources¹⁰ and creative ways that schools may reduce the fiscal costs of this bill and allow some local control while still prioritizing traditional academics and test scores.

To recap, the science is strong, this bill is an excellent first step, and the barriers can be managed, at least to some degree. What we need are children who are physically healthy, mentally fit and ready to learn in school. To my mind, this bill fits nicely with the goals outlined in the Kirwan report.

I urge you to both support and to encourage passage of Bill 516. Thank you.

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