

June 3, 2015

To: the Honorable Chairs and Members
Joint Committee on Education:

Re: S. 318, An Act to Promote Quality Physical Education

The Massachusetts Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (MCAAP), representing 1,800 pediatricians practicing throughout the Commonwealth, strongly supports S. 318, which would require physical education to be taught in our public and charter schools.

Healthcare costs are rising in our Commonwealth due to the increasing burden of preventable chronic illness. Physical activity is known to have a protective effect on cardiovascular health, and plays an essential role in the treatment of cardiac risk factors such as elevated cholesterol, elevated blood pressure, and Type II diabetes. A dedication to physical activity and appreciation for physical and mental health must be cultivated at a young age in order for children to grow into healthy adults. If passed, this legislation would promote increased physical activity and health awareness in our schools, leading to an overall improvement in the health of Massachusetts citizens.

Body Mass Index (BMI) is one indicator linked to poor health outcomes, and rates of childhood obesity and diabetes have grown to epidemic proportions; in 2010, more than one third of children aged 6-11 were overweight or obese. **Furthermore, a child aged 10-13 years who is obese has an 80% chance of being obese as an adult.** One crucial link to the increasing number of children suffering from obesity is a decrease in physical activity and an increase in sedentary activities. As pediatricians, we see the faces of the obesity epidemic every day, and we often feel we are fighting an uphill battle. We counsel families to increase physical activity, but our advice is unrealistic when many families do not have time or resources to provide these experiences for their children outside of school hours. They also have not received the health education required to understand the importance of physical activity over the lifespan.

S. 318 will help ensure that quality physical education (PE) will be provided in schools by requiring that PE be taught as a required subject in all grades, that it is taught by licensed and certified teachers, that there be no substitution of other instruction or activities. In addition, the bill requires that an evaluation of current physical education standards, practices and the instruction provided to students in all grades and that the findings for each school district are reported to the Legislature.

Physical activity not only improves health outcomes directly, it also improves school performance. A study published in the Journal of Pediatrics (February 28, 2013) found that **aerobically-fit children had a 2.4 times greater chance of passing math tests and a 2.2 times greater chance of passing reading tests compared with aerobically-unfit children.** These findings were independent of the children's BMI, indicating that

improving access to physical education could help all children, not only children suffering from overweight or obesity. In addition to the physical education components of the bill, the legislation also works to ensure that physical activity is built in naturally to the school day, by requiring a minimum of 50% of physical education to be devoted to actual physical activity. Under the legislation, schools may not use physical activity as a punishment nor withhold opportunities for physical activity as punishment.

Massachusetts' young students spend large amounts of time in the school environment. Schools must be a large part of any strategy to increase health, decrease obesity, and increase physical activity. Physical activity and education can actually increase test scores and enhance the learning environment. Pediatricians of the MCAAP fully support efforts to put these initiatives in place. We thank you for your time and consideration of this critical legislation.

Sincerely,
Michael McManus, M.D., FAAP
President