

Testimony
In support of SB542
Public School Students – Daily Physical Activity (Student Health and Fitness Act)
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Thank you, Senator Young for your sponsorship of this bill. Thank you, Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee members, for this opportunity to offer my strong support for SB542.

As a kinesiology and public health scientist who has been funded by both NIH and NSF, I have spent my entire 5- decade long career studying the motor skill development of infants and children. From my own scientific work and that of others, I offer three arguments in support of this bill.

First, it is in the long term best interest of the state of Maryland to have a healthy populace. Physical activity and vigorous physical activity, in particular, is a significant contributor to our health¹. Elementary age children spend about 6 hours of their day in school. And how many of those hours are spent sitting? Yes, most of those hours. Why should we be concerned? Because: Sitting is the new smoking. Yes, our sedentary behavior is killing us and has now surpassed smoking as a leading cause of premature death. Getting our children out of their seats many times a day everyday should definitely be our goal.

Second, getting the children out of their seats and moving has a second important consequence. The scientific literature is now showing rather convincingly that children who engage in moderate to vigorous physical activity have healthier brains that learn better, remember more, and are more attentive^{2,3,4,5}. Indeed, a recent review⁶ in the journal, *Pediatrics*, reported that physical activity, especially associated with physical education, improves classroom behaviors and improves academic achievement especially in mathematic-related skills and reading. What better way to support the goals of the Kirwan Commission than to enact this bill.

My third point is that physical or motor literacy is as important as reading literacy⁷. Physical education is not just running around the gymnasium, it is that part of the school's curriculum that provides instruction in motor skills that are at the foundation of a lifetime of continued participation in the sports, dance, and many recreational activities that offer the opportunity for physically activity⁸.

As the former dean of the state's School of Public Health in College Park, I leave you with a final message: Physical education is the best public health delivery system that the state of Maryland has – and increasing the time for physical education to 90 minutes per week is a modest, best first step.

Thank you.

References

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- ⁵ Haapala, E. A., Väistö, J., Lintu, N., Westgate, K., Ekelund, U., Poikkeus, A. M., ... & Lakka, T. A. (2017). Physical activity and sedentary time in relation to academic achievement in children. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport, 20*(6), 583-589.
- ⁶ Álvarez-Bueno, C., Pesce, C., Cavero-Redondo, I., Sánchez-López, M., Garrido-Miguel, M., & Martínez-Vizcaíno, V. (2017). Academic achievement and physical activity: a meta-analysis. *Pediatrics, 140*(6), e20171498.
- ⁷ <https://www.physical-literacy.org.uk/>
- ⁸ Cairney, J., Dudley, D., Kwan, M., Bulten, R., & Kriellaars, D. (2019). Physical literacy, physical activity and health: Toward an evidence-informed conceptual model. *Sports Medicine, 49*(3), 371-383.