

Written Testimony for SB 542 on March 3rd, 2020

To: Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan and members of Education, Health and Environment Com.

From: Jill Whitall, PhD. Fellow of National Academy of Kinesiology
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Support: Favorable

I write in strong support of SB542 as a former physical educator, a teacher of student elementary physical educators and a funded NIH researcher of motor development in children with and without movement problems. I have three points.

First, the scientific evidence is clear about the physical and mental health benefits gained from the quantity of moderate to vigorous exercise^{1,2,3,4}; but there are also unsung 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 that also extend into later in life^{5,6,7,8}. This means that movement quality as well as movement quantity can improve academic performance.

Second, this Bill is good precisely because it combines both quantity of exercise through recess activity and quality of movement through physical education. Good elementary physical education involves developing mature 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 competent⁹, and will continue their physical activity later in life^{10,11}.

Third, the barriers to implementation can be reduced. If physical education should include time to acquire academic knowledge and if recess can be structured to encourage the practice and exercise of motor skills then there is already existing evidence^{12,13}, existing resources¹⁴ and creative ways that schools can reduce the fiscal costs of this Bill and allow some local control while still prioritizing traditional academics and test scores. It is not justified to argue that academics will suffer or that there is no room in the curriculum. This point is directly related to Section E of the Bill.

To summarize, the science is strong, this Bill is a good step forward, and the barriers to implementation can be reduced. What we need are children who are physically healthy, mentally fit and ready to learn in school. This Bill complements the goals outlined in the Kirwan report.

I urge the committee to both support and to encourage passage of Bill 542. Thank you.

References overleaf.

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