

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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Date: January 2, 2020

Source of Report: Education Committee Letter re: LD 1343

Topic: Improve Health Education and Physical Education in Schools

Context

The Maine Department of Education realizes the importance of physical activity to student health and academic achievement. Evidence suggests a positive impact of physical activity on academic achievement and in reducing behavioral challenges. The Department understands that it is in the best interest of school districts to engage students across all grade levels in physical activity throughout the school day. Active recess time, physical education classes, and utilizing action-based learning strategies in the classroom can all be part of the regular school day.

A growing body of evidence supports the practice of providing increased time for physical education and other school-based physical activity programs as one means to support academic outcomes. The evidence suggests that mathematics and reading are the academic content areas that are most influenced positively by physical activity. Success in these content areas requires students' efficient and effective executive function which are two cognitive processes that improve with physical activity. Given the importance of time on task to learning, it suggested to allow for frequent physical activity breaks that are developmentally appropriate (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Actions

In the late summer of 2019, the Maine Obesity Advisory Council developed six goals to help reduce obesity and the medical conditions associated with obesity. One of these goals is to increase physical education and physical activity in all public schools. A policy measure for achieving this goal is for school districts to establish a comprehensive plan and timeline for reaching evidence-based recommendations for all grades, Pre-K-12, in physical education and physical activity.

The Department researched and collected resources relating to accessible programs that are designed to promote physical activity during the school day. This information was provided to district, school, and classroom leaders in December 2019.

Findings

The Department identified several sources that highlighted possible suggestions for movement in the classroom.

[Healthy Kids Healthy Futures](#)

Staff can learn about the benefits and best practices of physical activity in child care and early education (including pre-school) settings. Physical activity habits learned in early childhood can last a lifetime.

[Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program](#)

This guide is for schools and school districts to develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive physical activity programs. School-age youth should participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day, and schools have a significant role to play in helping students achieve this goal. This guide will help schools identify how to establish more active school environments.

[Let's Go](#)

Let's Go! is a childhood obesity prevention program found across Maine and in Mt. Washington Valley, New Hampshire. These programs use evidence-based strategies to increase healthy eating and physical activity among children from birth to 18. The foundation for change is the 5-2-1-0 healthy habits message, developed in Maine and recognized nationally.

[Explore Physical Activity](#)

School staff can learn about the five components of a comprehensive school physical activity program and how this new national model can support a culture of physical activity at your school.

[I Can Do It \(ICDI\)](#)

The "*I Can Do It*" program is a strategic physical activity program for students with disabilities in the K-12 school setting designed to provide access, equity, and facilitate and encourage opportunities for students with disabilities to be physically active for 60 minutes a day.

Specific Class Motor Break Ideas

[Classroom Exercise Breaks for Elementary Students](#)

Classroom exercise break suggestions for elementary school classrooms.

[Reading](#)

Literacy and movement suggestions to engage middle school students in acquiring knowledge. The suggestions require minimal materials and teacher preparation.

[Scholastic Teachers](#)

Suggestions for combining both exercise and movement in early childhood classrooms across the content areas.

[Math: quick physical activity games](#)

Movement suggestions to engage students while improving number sense.

[Physical Activity Math Games](#)

A list of possibilities for supporting kinesthetic learners during mathematics instruction.

[Classrooms in Motion](#)

A review resource hub for teachers committed to infusing movement into their instructional plans.

Recommendations

School, district, or regional professional development in conjunction with ongoing Department of Education support for and training about the importance of physical activity and exercise breaks, and their relation to academic achievement as well as to social and emotional wellbeing, should continue. Furthermore, non-profit entities, state agencies such as the Center for Disease Control, and community-education partnerships should continue to work collaboratively with educators to promote physical activity in schools as a means to maintain optimal student wellness and academic success.

References

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). *The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, including Physical Education, and Academic Performance*. Washington, DC, Author. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/pa-pe_paper.pdf

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STATE OF MAINE
ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

A. Pender Makin
Commissioner of Education
Maine Department of Education
23 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0023

June 10, 2019

Dear Commissioner Makin:

On behalf of the members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, we are writing to you in regards to LD 1343, An Act to Improve Health Education and Physical Education in Schools.

During the public hearing and work session, we heard about the importance of physical activity for students in school and the positive association between physical activity and classroom behavior. However, we also heard that many students in Maine are not getting enough opportunities for physical activity. Although the committee does not feel that this issue needs to be addressed through legislation, we respectfully request that the department look into what opportunities and programs, such as Maine Health's 5-2-1-0 Let's Go program, might be available to help incorporate more physical activity into a student's school day, and report back to the committee by January 1, 2020 on what additional opportunities and programs might be available.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter, and please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Sen. Rebecca J. Millett
Senate Chair

Rep. Victoria P. Kornfield
House Chair

Cc: Members, Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Dr. Karen Kusiak, Legislative Director, Department of Education