

Senator Mike Dunleavy  
Chair, Senate Education Committee  
State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801

The American Heart Association advocates for daily, quality physical education in our schools. The nationally recommended levels are 150 minutes per week for elementary school students and 225 minutes per week for middle school students. Senate Bill 200 will establish a minimum amount of physical activity that school districts provide to students daily, and I write on behalf of the AHA in support of this bill.

Childhood obesity has reached epidemic proportions in the United States. Nearly 35% of children ages 2 to 19 are overweight or obese. As these children grow older, they have a much greater risk than their healthy weight peers of developing and dying from chronic diseases in adulthood. One important way to stop this rise in obesity and chronic disease in our children is by establishing lifelong physical activity habits with strong physical education programs and regular physical activity opportunities throughout the school day.

Physical activity is associated with a healthier, longer life and lower risk of cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, and some cancers. In fact research suggests that regular participation in physical education classes helps reduce obesity in low-income teenagers who are disproportionately affected by the childhood obesity epidemic. However the benefits go far behind physical fitness. Research also shows physically fit children have higher scholastic achievement, better classroom behavior and less absenteeism than their unfit counterparts. Less obesity levels can also mean lower long term Medicaid costs to the State.

We applaud Senator Costello's consideration of a policy that would put greater emphasis on physical education, bringing physical, academic and social benefit to all students. While this policy has the flexibility for school districts to decide whether this is done through increased time in physical education class, unstructured time like recess, or in classroom exercises, we hope this policy will lay the groundwork for moving Alaska's students closer to the nationally recommended levels of physical education. This can be done through planned instructional programs with specific objectives that increase the physical competence, health-related fitness, self-responsibility, and enjoyment of physical activity for all students so that they can establish physical activity as a natural part of everyday life.

Sincerely,



Eric W. Batch  
Vice President, Advocacy  
American Heart Association, Western States Affiliate

CC: Senate Education Committee Members