

April 13, 2015

Senate letter to Gillibrand and TBD
House letter to Kind and Meehan

Dear [member]:

The undersigned organizations thank you for introducing the Fitness Integrated with Teaching Kids (FIT Kids) Act. This bill will help our children obtain a much needed head start on a healthy life by providing regular, quality physical education.

As you know, childhood obesity in the United States is at epidemic proportions. Nearly one in three children is overweight or obese. Since children spend a significant time in school, it is critical that our educational institutions support and encourage activities and curricular instruction that allow students to be physically active and obtain the knowledge and skills they will need to enjoy a lifetime of good health. Regular physical activity is associated with a healthier, longer life and with lower risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, and some cancers. In addition, physically fit children have higher scholastic achievement, better classroom behavior, greater ability to focus, and less absenteeism than their unfit counterparts.

Unfortunately, many youth are increasingly sedentary throughout their day, meeting neither physical education nor national physical activity recommendations. Experts recommend that children engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day of the week, with 30 minutes of it taking place during the school day. Sadly, only 3.8 percent of elementary, 7.9 percent of middle, and 2.1 percent of high schools currently provide daily physical education or its equivalent for the entire school year. Twenty-two percent of schools do not require students to take any physical education at all.

Despite these glaring statistics, the only source of federal grant funding dedicated to physical education - the Physical Education Program (PEP) - was cut by 37 percent during the fiscal year 2015 appropriations. PEP provides grants to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and community-based organizations to initiate, expand, or enhance physical education programs for students in kindergarten through 12th grade. In its 13 years, PEP has produced improvements in muscular strength, muscular endurance, and cardiovascular endurance. Since the average school budget for physical education is only \$764 per year, these grants are invaluable in supporting physical education and physical activity in schools. And the demand for PEP grants is high: currently, only ten percent of applicants are awarded grants out of the thousands that apply.

Evidence suggests that quality physical education programs are effective and more essential today than ever. Embedded within the program are important outcome measures around the amount of time students are physically active in schools and the number of students who are achieving a certain level of physical fitness.

Given the strong evidence of the importance of physical education and the current risks to our children's well-being by physical inactivity and a lack of quality physical education programs, FIT Kids is needed now more than ever. The Institute of Medicine report, *Educating the Student Body: Taking Physical Activity and Physical Education to School* reinforced the importance of physical education, and made several recommendations on how to strengthen physical education programs, including some of the policies addressed in FIT Kids. Specifically, FIT Kids would:

- Restore PEP funding to FY2014 levels;
- Enhance and strengthen the PEP program by requiring local educational agencies: to annually evaluate the curriculum and report the results of fitness assessments – data that is currently sorely lacking and will give local leaders the information they need to improve physical education and physical activity within their schools and communities.;
- Support professional development for health and physical education teachers that is specific to their field to boost students' ability to learn, and to promote healthy lifestyles and physical activity.

We commend your leadership on physical education and this bill. We look forward to working with you to move this legislation through Congress.

Sincerely,

American Heart Association