

Testimony of Charlene R. Burgeson

Executive Director  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR SPORT AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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Healthy Schools Act of 2009

Chairman Gray, Chairwoman Cheh, and members of the City Council, I am Charlene Burgeson, Executive Director of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE). NASPE is the preeminent national authority on physical education and a recognized leader in sport and physical activity. I thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Healthy Schools Act, and in particular, the provisions that address physical education and physical activity in the D.C. city schools. We commend Council member Cheh for her efforts to address the childhood and youth obesity epidemic through the provisions in this legislation.

As you well know, childhood obesity rates have climbed dramatically in the last 20 years. According to a Trust for America's Health study, "F as in Fat 2009", the rate of adolescent obesity in D.C. is among the highest in the nation. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Survey tells us that only 30% of DC high school students participate in 60 or more minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily while 24% do not participate in 60 minutes of physical activity on any day of the week (in other words, they are totally inactive). To make matters worse, 84% of DC high school students do not attend physical education classes daily.

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) recommends that all P-12 schools implement a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program that encompasses physical activity programming before, during, and after the school day. Quality physical education, based on a sequential curriculum and taught by certified physical education teachers, serves as the foundation of the program. The goal of physical education is to develop physically educated individuals who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity.

Adoption of the Healthy Schools Act would enhance physical education provided in the D.C. schools by ensuring that students participate in the nationally recommended 150 minutes per week in elementary school and 225 minutes per week in middle school. The 225 minutes per week national recommendation also applies to high school, and we urge the Council to expand the bill to include grades 9-12.

It is very important to understand the difference between physical activity and physical education. Physical activity is a behavior – obviously a very important one. Physical education is a school curricular area that teaches the knowledge, skills, and confidence an individual needs to be physically active – in

other words, to be a physically educated person. Individuals lacking the necessary knowledge, skills, and confidence are less likely to be active in their discretionary time throughout their lives. To ensure that school administrators and teachers understand the difference and implement programs accordingly, NASPE urges the Council to modify Title IV, Section 401 to read "Physical education requirements" instead of "Physical activity requirements."

NASPE supports the bill's provisions for students with disabilities to receive a suitably adapted physical education program and not allowing the use of physical activity, through requiring or withholding it, to punish students. We also support the establishment of the Healthy Youth and Schools Commission. The draft bill calls for members who are experts in health, wellness, or nutrition as well as parents and students. In regard to the member experts, we encourage the Council to add "physical education and physical activity" as expertise.

NASPE urges the Council to support and pass this important bill. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Thank you.