

HEALTHY SCHOOLS ACT OF 2010
JOINT PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 26, 2010

Good morning. My name is Polly Thibodeau and I am the Development Director at Joy of Motion Dance Center. Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

I am here as a representative of Joy of Motion Dance Center and of the DC dance community to voice our enthusiastic support of the Healthy Schools Act of 2010. As one in three children in the District is overweight or obese - one of the highest rates of childhood obesity in the U.S.¹ - this legislation is an important step in turning the tide.

In particular, I am most interested in Section 401, intended to increase exercise and physical activity requirements in our schools. I urge the Council, DC Public Schools, and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education to think of dance when implementing these targets.

According to The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports,² physical fitness is comprised of four basic components:

1. Cardiorespiratory Endurance
2. Muscular Strength
3. Muscular Endurance
4. Flexibility

Dance addresses all of these.

Furthermore, dance is an art form. As such, dance helps children mature not just physically, but also emotionally, socially, and cognitively. It engages children and teens in the creative process, in problem solving, and in teamwork. Dance is an outlet for self-expression and boosts self-confidence. And it reaches all kinds of learners, whether one is a kinesthetic, visual/spatial, auditory, interpersonal, linguistic, or logical learner.

There is a body of literature about the benefits of arts programs for kids. And there is a body of literature about the benefits of exercise programs for kids. Put those together, and dance, then, is really an ideal activity for children and teens. *Dance is for Everyone* is our motto at Joy of Motion Dance Center.

If dance provides a lot of bang for the buck, then it is also worth noting that it doesn't require a lot of bucks. No special equipment or gear is necessary, just some space and a boom box.

In 2008, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education approved learning standards in dance for the DC Public Schools.³ They are available on the DCPS website and should prove a useful tool for these purposes.

¹ Trust for America's Health. *F as in Fat: How Obesity Policies are Failing in America*, 2009. Washington, DC: TFAH, 2009.

² The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports: <http://www.fitness.gov/fitness.htm>

Finally, I'd like to volunteer that the staff at Joy of Motion Dance Center take mid-afternoon dance and stretch breaks, and I personally am always more alert and focused for grant writing, reading, and other work after I've gotten my blood and body moving. In addition to my anecdotal evidence, however, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has reviewed the research on the topic⁴ and found that:

1. Sacrificing physical education for classroom time does not improve academic performance.
2. Kids who are more physically active tend to perform better academically.
3. Activity breaks can improve cognitive performance and classroom behavior.

In closing, I congratulate Councilmember Cheh, Chairman Gray, their staff, and all the stakeholders who have crafted the language of the Healthy Schools Act. And I urge you to consider dance as you roll out the physical activity requirements.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,
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³ DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education. *Arts Education Standards*. Washington, DC: DC OSSE, 2008.
<http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/In+the+Classroom/What+Students+Are+Learning/Learning+Standards+for+Arts%2C+Health%2C+and+Physical+Education+for+Grades+Pre-K-12>

⁴ Active Living Research. *Active Education: Physical Education, Physical Activity, and Academic Performance*. San Diego: Active Living Research, Fall 2007.