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May 25, 2016

John B. King, Jr.
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave. SW, Room 3E306
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Dr. King:

On behalf of the American Heart Association, including the American Stroke Association, and our more than 30 million volunteers and supporters, we appreciate the opportunity to provide input to the Department on provisions related to physical education in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that we believe should be clarified through non-regulatory guidance.

The American Heart Association is the nation's oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting cardiovascular disease and stroke. As such, we support strengthening standards for physical education throughout K-12 education to address the cardiovascular health of our nation's children and their long-term well-being.

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.ⁱ In addition, physically fit children have higher scholastic achievement, better classroom behavior, greater ability to focus, and less absenteeism than their unfit counterparts.^{ii iiiiv} Unfortunately, many youth are increasingly sedentary throughout their day, meeting neither physical education nor national physical activity recommendations.

Physical education in schools has been decreasing in recent years.^v Only 3.8 percent of elementary, 7.9 percent of middle, and 2.1 percent of high schools provide daily physical education or its equivalent for the entire school year.^{vi} Twenty-two percent of schools do not require students to take any physical education at all.^{vii} Nationwide, only 51.8 percent of high school students attend at least some physical education classes and only about one-third – 31.5 percent – of those students have daily physical education.^{viii}

Given these data, we believe it is critical for the Department to make clear the importance of physical education in school programs and curricula. Title VIII of ESSA clearly defines a “well-rounded education” to include health and physical

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education. In addition, we believe it is important to provide information and guidance to states, districts, and other grantees that describes all of the new opportunities the new law provides to advance physical education in K-12 schools through a “well-rounded education.”

In Title I, these opportunities include embedding physical education into the Local Educational Agency (LEA) Plans, Schoolwide Programs, and Targeted Assistance Programs. In addition, the term “well-rounded education” is included in the definition of professional development and stakeholders should understand that they can use Title II funds to provide professional development to physical education teachers. States and districts may also advance physical education through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program in Title IV of the statute.

The Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants, also in Title IV, Part A of the statute, not only provide support for physical education through a “well-rounded education” and the safe and healthy students category, but also provide support for technology, which can be a critical tool for distance learning with regard to physical education. We respectfully request that the Department include in their guidance not only information on how states and districts can advance physical education opportunities through funding for well-rounded and safe and healthy students activities and programs, but also how technology funds can be used for this purpose.

In addition, while the new law provides multiple opportunities for states and districts to advance physical education in school, it is also important that the Department provide guidance on how and why to implement effective physical education programs. According to the 2016 “[Shape of the Nation](#)” report, while states and districts have been implementing physical education programs and activities, there is still work to be done in expanding and improving these programs. We strongly believe the Department should consider the following when developing guidance for states and districts.

Standards-Based Curriculum

- The Department should provide guidance to states on adopting physical education curriculum standards that are aligned to the [National Standards and Grade-Level Outcomes for K-12 Physical Education](#) and are systematically reviewed and updated.
- The Department should provide guidance to districts to develop and implement a planned, K-12 sequential physical education curriculum that adheres to national and state standards for physical education and includes a comprehensive student assessment program.

Accountability

- The Department should provide guidance to states on how to work with school districts and schools to complete comprehensive self-assessments of their physical education program and physical activity offerings using the [School Health Index](#) at regular intervals consistent with state and district assessment. The results of the assessment should be integrated into the district or school’s long-term strategic planning, School Improvement Plan, or school wellness policy, to address the quality and quantity of physical education offered. Findings should be shared with appropriate state agencies, parents, and communities.

- The Department should provide the following guidance for key data that could be collected, including:
 - How many students are taking physical education;
 - How many days per year students are taking physical education;
 - How many total minutes of physical activity per week;
 - How many class periods per week of physical education;
 - Whether the school and/or district has adopted metrics for assessing their physical education program;
 - Whether there are requirements for fitness, cognitive, and affective assessment in physical education that are based on student improvement and knowledge gain;
 - Implementation of the Presidential Youth Fitness Program that includes FitnessGram, a recognition program, and professional development opportunities for teachers; and
 - How many of the district's physical education teachers are licensed, certified, and endorsed to teach physical education, show plans for ensuring all physical education teachers get these credentials, and show progress for meeting these teaching quality goals.

Professional Development

- The Department should provide guidance to states on the importance of adequate professional development, especially for districts serving at-risk students and minority populations.
- The Department should provide guidance on how to integrate public health into professional development, educating members of the profession on their role within the public health model.
- The Department should provide guidance to states on the importance of keeping teachers current on emerging technologies, model programs, and improved teaching methods.

Physical Education as Part of the Curriculum

- The Department should provide guidance to states and districts on the importance of including physical education as a core academic subject. Physical education teachers should coordinate the physical activity initiatives with other aspects of the academic curriculum throughout the school day. Teachers should use physical education homework to extend time spent in physical activity and knowledge gain.

Recommended Time for Physical Education and Physical Activity

- The Department should provide the most up-to-date information on physical education requirements which:
 - Provide all students with 150 minutes per week of physical education in elementary schools and 225 minutes per week in middle schools and high schools. Achieve best practice of students being physically active for at least 50 percent of physical education class time.
 - Provide adequate physical education and other physical activity opportunities to facilitate school-age children accumulating at least 60 minutes of physical activity before, during and after school and avoiding prolonged periods of

inactivity. The key method for achieving this goal is physical education supplemented by additional physical activity opportunities throughout the day.

- The Department should encourage states to count physical education credit(s) for graduation from high school with appropriate accommodations and considerations for children with disabilities and medical conditions.

Adequate Resources for Physical Education

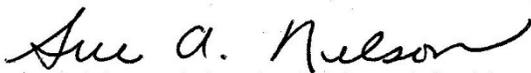
- The Department should provide information to states on the importance of providing adequate resources to districts for implementation of physical education programs which may include:
 - Hiring a physical education coordinator at the state level to provide resources and offer support to school districts across the state.
 - Hiring a physical education administrator in the school district to provide support to physical educators in the school district.
 - Assuring that physical education programs have appropriate equipment and adequate facilities and appropriate student-teacher ratios since research shows that increasing access to human and material resources during class enhances the opportunity for students to engage in the recommended amount and intensity of physical activity.

Thankfully, we do not have to reinvent the wheel when it comes to finding evidenced-based physical education programs. [FitnessGram](#), for example, not only ties into physical education curriculum and the classroom, but also provides surveillance, school and individual recognition, professional development, and other tools and resources. [SHAPE America](#) has also developed national physical education standards upon which states and LEAs across the country use to develop or revise existing curricula, in addition to the tools, resources, and technical assistance they provide. There are also a host of other evidenced-based, physical education programs that districts or schools may choose to use with access to these new resources from ESSA, such as [SPARK](#), [Fitness for Life](#), or [CATCH](#).

The American Heart Association stands ready to partner with the Department, states, and LEAs to ensure that all students have access to the evidence-based physical education they need and deserve, but we need the Department's help. Given the changes in statute and the fact that physical education is eligible for resources not previously available, clear, comprehensive information is needed from the Department.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment and we look forward to continuing to work with the Department on ESSA implementation in the coming months. If you have any questions or need any assistance, please contact Kristy Anderson at (202) 785-7927 or kristy.anderson@heart.org.

Sincerely,



Sue A. Nelson
Vice President, Federal Advocacy
American Heart Association

CC: Monique Chism, Deputy Assistant Secretary

ⁱ Eyre H, Kahn R, Robertson RM, Clark NG, Doyle C, Hong Y, Gansler T, Glynn T, Smith RA, Taubert K, Thun MJ, American Cancer S, American Diabetes A and American Heart A. Preventing cancer, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes: a common agenda for the American Cancer Society, the American Diabetes Association, and the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 2004;109:3244-55.

ⁱⁱ Shore SM, Sachs ML, Lidicker JR, et. al. Decreased scholastic achievement in overweight middle school students. *Obesity* 2008;16,1535–1538.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, and Academic Performance* Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2010

ⁱⁱⁱ Geier AB, et. al. The Relationship Between Relative Weight and School Attendance. *Obesity* 2007. 15:2157-2161.

^{iv} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, and Academic Performance* Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2010

^v K-12 Education: School-based physical education and sports programs. 2012.

^{vi} Lee SM, Burgeson CR, Fulton JE and Spain CG. Physical education and physical activity: results from the School Health Policies and Programs Study 2006. *The Journal of school health*. 2007;77:435-63.

^{vii} 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. 2008.

^{viii} Eaton DK, Kann L, Kinchen S, Shanklin S, Flint KH, Hawkins J, Harris WA, Lowry R, McManus T, Chyen D, Whittle L, Lim C, Wechsler H, Centers for Disease C and Prevention. Youth risk behavior surveillance - United States, 2011. *MMWR Surveill Summ*. 2012;61:1-162.