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## *Physical Education for Maine Children: It's About Time*

**Currently there is no minimum time requirement for Physical Education (PE) in Maine elementary and middle schools.** Maine Learning Results requires a basic PE competency, which can be tested without any time spent in class. Meanwhile, most PE teachers report that current time allocations are taken up in large part by the assessment process.

**Kids need more than just activity; they need a learning environment.** By combining moderate to vigorous activity, skill building, and cognitive understanding, PE gives children an opportunity for daily exercise, but it also teaches them the skills they need to be active throughout their lifetime. Certified PE teachers are necessary to make this comprehensive approach successful.

**Physical inactivity and poor nutrition are major contributors to the childhood obesity epidemic.** Of Maine kids entering kindergarten, 36% are overweight or at risk for overweight, and today's generation may be the first to have a lower life expectancy than their parents' generation.

**Parents struggle to balance hectic schedules and many don't have time to supervise their children's regular exercise.** They need the support of the school setting to address this important health issue. At the same time, physically active and healthy kids are more prepared to learn.

**Kids are leading more sedentary lives so school-based PE is becoming even more important.** Children in the U.S. spend an average of 26 hours per week watching TV, but only 1.6 hours engaged in physical activity.

**Moderate to vigorous activity levels need to become a habit.** According to federal health guidelines, kids should engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity on most, and preferably all days of the week. Yet, only 57% of Maine schools provide 30 or more minutes of recess for students daily, and only 7% of high school students experience daily physical education.

**It's easier to maintain a healthy weight when you start with a healthy weight.** Overweight adolescents have a 70% chance of becoming overweight adults.

**Currently, what a child receives for PE depends on where she goes to school – it isn't a level playing field.** A statewide minimum guideline is necessary because every child deserves the opportunity to learn and practice the skills needed to be active throughout their lifetime.

**The cost of PE is small compared to the cost of obesity.** If we don't invest in healthy children now, we will pay even more later, as these same kids experience the health effects of living at an unhealthy weight. Over \$350 million is spent every year in Maine on medical expenditures attributable to obesity – a burden all Maine people and businesses ultimately bear.

**Physical Education is one of the keys to reducing Maine's obesity rates so our children can live healthier lives.**



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## ***Synopsis of PE4ME***

- Physical Education should be a required subject in grades K-8.
- Schools should strive for 150 minutes per week of Physical Education at the elementary and middle school level. Aside from PE classes, schools should strive to provide an environment in which students are physically active for at least 30 minutes each day of school. The physical activity goal can also be met through time being active in PE class.
- There should be no substitution of other instruction or activities for Physical Education.
- All schools should strive to implement the PE4ME guidelines by 2015-2016 school year at the latest.
- All courses should be taught by certified Physical Education teachers.
- New state revenues are to be raised in order to provide 100% of the total new cost of providing PE for all K-8 students in Maine. A new state fund is to be created that will collect new revenue from sources identified as being related to the causes of obesity and other chronic disease. Examples of possible sources include surcharges on soda, junk food (foods of minimal nutritional value), and non-cigarette tobacco products.

## ***PE4ME Highlights***

- PE4ME is proposing a clear seven-year roadmap to implementation of a statewide evidence-based physical education program for all K-8 students.
- The benefits of physical education and physical activity go well beyond obesity prevention and control. The value of the physical, mental, and social benefits cannot be understated. Students who get recommended levels of physical activity are more confident, better learners, less likely to get chronic diseases, and more likely to avoid unhealthy behaviors like tobacco and drugs.
- Implementing a high-quality evidence-based PE program for every K-8 student in Maine is an essential next step in our efforts to reduce obesity, chronic disease, and the resulting health costs that burden Maine citizens and Maine businesses.
- It will take a comprehensive approach that includes state policies, school programs, community programs, public education, and strong partnerships with medical providers.