

## Key Points for Letter to Editor

### “Flip-flop in Springfield”

Governor Blagojevich recently reversed his position on waivers to the state law mandating daily physical education. In his January 2004 State of the State address, the governor pitched childhood fitness, proposing a ban on junk food in schools and an end to the practice of granting PE waivers. Now however, based on a recommendation by the State Board of Education, of which 7 of the 9 board members were appointed by the governor, the state legislature will be asked to consider a plan that would make it even easier to skirt the state’s daily PE requirement.

This decision demonstrates a remarkable misperception of the need for a key tool in the battle to improve the health of the children of Illinois. As the citizens of Illinois, we should press the administration and state legislature to oppose the recommendation to make it easier for children to be waived from physical education. The following points outline the rationale for opposing the recommendation from the ISBE and Governor Blagojevich:

1. *Healthy children are better learners.* They miss fewer days. They score better academically. They are more alert.
2. *Children cannot be healthy without regular participation in appropriate physical activity.* An inactive lifestyle is associated with over 19 disease conditions afflicting at least nine major organ systems.
3. *Just participating in movement may not be sufficient to bring about long-term health and fitness benefits.* Participating in athletics, cheerleading, marching band, etc all include involvement in varying amounts of physical activity, but they lack instruction and participation in lifetime physical activity. Many athletes, cheerleaders, and band members join the sedentary masses when they are no longer a part of the team, squad, or band. The focus of participating in these events is not to improve health and fitness, but to improve performance. For this reason, many athletes, cheerleaders, and band members never learn about how to be active for a lifetime. Physical education classes teach students about how to be active for a lifetime.
4. *Communities do not save money by eliminating physical education.* Good health requires monetary support. It’s a case of pay me now, or pay me later. You can pay for prevention or you can pay for rehabilitation. Any medical professional or economist will tell you that rehabilitation is exponentially more expensive than prevention. If you eliminate physical education now, whatever small savings are accrued immediately will be more than overwhelmed by the expenses your community will have to absorb as more children succumb to the diseases associated with living a sedentary lifestyle. Cutting PE and the impact such action will have on your child’s health will only mortgage your child’s future and be much more costly from a financial as well as humanitarian standpoint.

5. If we use the adult experience as a model, we see the following pattern of disease development. Inactivity leads to overweight and obesity. Overweight and obesity lead to Type II diabetes. Diabetes leads to cardiovascular diseases such as heart attack and stroke. Traditionally this pattern has expressed itself in middle age. What should scare you now is that we are currently seeing more sedentary children, more overweight and obese children, and more children with Type II diabetes. The consequence of this is that *we will soon see 17 and 18 year olds showing up in the emergency rooms of our hospitals with heart attacks and strokes*. If you think it's expensive to fund preventative programs like physical education, what do you think the costs of rehabilitative programs will be like as more people become sicker at younger ages?

Please send a clear message to the Governor and the Legislature: Our children's health is too important to be a pawn in financial politics. Saving pennies now by abandoning our children's health only to pay much more later does not make sense and is just plain wrong!.