



Board of Education

San Diego Unified School District

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Katherine Nakamura
Trustee
Board of Education

March 3, 2009

The Honorable Mary Salas
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 2137
Sacramento, CA 95814

By facsimile: 916-319-2179

RE: AB 351 (Salas) Physical Education
Position: Support (Sponsor)

Dear Assembly Member Salas,

San Diego Unified School District is the second largest school district in the state. It is our mission to provide all San Diego students with a quality education so that they graduate with the skills, motivation, curiosity, and resilience to succeed in their choice of college and career in order to lead and participate in the society of tomorrow. We believe that it is important to provide students with quality physical fitness opportunities, and sincerely thank you for authoring AB 351 to help school districts like ours meet this objective.

Quality Educational Opportunities for Physical Fitness

AB 351 provides school children with more opportunities to meet the state's physical education requirement by counting participation in interscholastic athletic programs, marching band, drill team, and Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps toward meeting the PE instructional minutes requirement outlined in EC § 51222. This legislation would provide formal recognition of these rigorous fitness regiments that are critical to students' educational experiences and that prepare them well for the FITNESSGRAM, the state's comprehensive battery of physical fitness tests.¹

Based on longitudinal district data, San Diego Unified has concluded that AB 351 is essential to providing us with consistent authority to improve physical education outcomes. For example, a district-wide comparison of FITNESSGRAM scores shows marching band students outscored their peers who took traditional PE courses by over 18%. There is good reason to believe that there is a causal relationship.

- The FITNESSGRAM scores of the same marching band students showed a 10% increase in physical fitness after six months of marching band in the ninth grade than when those students took the test in seventh grade (prior to marching band participation). In contrast, their peers in traditional PE courses essentially remained status quo with only a 1% increase.

¹ The State Board of Education (SBE) designated the *FITNESSGRAM*® as the Physical Fitness Test for students in California public schools. The test is composed of six fitness areas: (1) Aerobic Capacity; (2) Abdominal Strength and Endurance; (3) Upper Body Strength and Endurance; (4) Body Composition; (5) Trunk Extensor Strength; and (6) Flexibility.

- Scientific research confirms that music stimulus improves aerobic activity. *The Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* recently reported that there is a 15% endurance boost when walking on a treadmill to music.² Add carrying a 40 pound sousaphone, or even playing a flute while properly holding your elbows above your heart in a five mile parade all the while blowing air through a tube in synchronous rhythm, and it is easy to understand why marching band students get such great FITNESSGRAM results.

Authentic PE Standards

From a national perspective PE standards will be better met by allowing these programs to thrive. Some states allow for an even broader array of physical fitness activities to meet high school requirements than is proposed in AB 351. These states notably include Texas, the cradle of No Child Left Behind, and Illinois, home of President Obama and the new Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. Twenty-seven other states with high academic standards such as North Carolina, Iowa, Minnesota, and Connecticut have policies that mirror that of AB 351 in allowing programs with rigorous aerobic activity to qualify as PE courses. Of the other states, many do not have similar policies simply because they have little or no physical fitness requirement at all. In its own way, AB 351 better aligns CA physical education requirements with those of the majority of the states in the country, while also being uniquely Californian—it recognizes our state’s leadership in providing plentiful alternative and healthy opportunities for physical fitness.

Undue State Pressure

However, without AB 351, districts will be hard pressed to continue providing these programs. The Southern California School Band and Orchestra Association (SCSBOA) reports that since PE course graduation requirements in the Los Angeles Unified School District have been strictly implemented to exclude marching band, enrollment in the program has plummeted by 50% in only two years time. These findings have been repeated in other districts across the state as school boards have bowed to a loss of local control on this issue.

This legislation reflects the groundswell of local activity among school boards, principals, parents, and students to counter these trends. San Francisco, Long Beach, Pasadena, Sweetwater, Riverside, and many other districts have expressed their concern for their programs to the California School Boards Association. Local principals in the Association of California School Administrators have also taken a stand.

Education Program Impact

School districts are under increasing pressure to promote student self-discipline, leadership training, community service, peer-to-peer tutoring, applied mathematics, teamwork, vocational training, experiential education, small learning communities, and parent involvement, along with a variety of other social values—which all of these programs have provided *for generations*. For well over 50 years in California, these programs have been, are, and should continue to be an intrinsic part of the American high school experience. And, in the end, *these are the programs that keep our kids coming to school*.

² Karageorghis, C. I., D. A. Mouzourides, D. Priest, T. A. Sasso, D. J. Morrish, and C. L. Walley. 2009. “Psychophysical and Ergogenic Effects of Synchronous Music During Treadmill Walking.” *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology* (31): 18-36.

Financial Impact

In these financial times school districts are desperately seeking relief through budget flexibility and local control. Under current law, school districts would have to invest significant resources to provide all students with traditional PE curriculum in addition to existing and successful marching band, drill team, Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps, and interscholastic athletic programs. In this time of financial crisis, however, school districts cannot afford to hire additional PE teachers to team teach these courses nor can districts afford to add an extra period to the day so that students can both take PE and participate in one of these programs. Even in better financial times, it is unclear if any of these arrangements would constitute the best use of limited public school funds. At the very least, school districts should have the ability to make this determination locally, rather than feel forced into significant instructional and budgetary decisions to preserve critical programs that do in fact prepare students to meet the standards to be considered physically fit.

There also is the question of protecting local investment in these programs. Parents and other supporters annually spend and raise millions of dollars to support their children's programs. Without this legislation, the millions of dollars that public school families and school districts have invested in uniforms, musical instruments, equipment, banners, flags, and other accoutrements will be mothballed forever in most school districts.

Necessary Solution/ Responses to Opponents' Arguments

We have heard some opponents of AB 351 present arguments that we wish to address in advance.

- Opponents' Argument: Marching band teachers, drill team teachers, JROTC commanders, etc. should/ can earn single subject PE credentials before these courses receive PE credit. Or, instructors should teach a zero-period course that does not count toward PE requirements.

Placing this requirement on marching band teachers and JROTC commanders would be unconscionable. In addition to their daily classroom duties, these dedicated professionals already conduct practices almost nightly during the week, hold parent meetings, and fundraisers, and arrive as early as 4 a.m. on weekends to accompany their students to all-day competitions. To ask for more with a zero period or an extra teaching credential would justifiably threaten an exodus from the profession.

- Opponents' Argument: Districts have options such as eliminating the ninth grade component for these programs or offering other alternatives.

We beg to differ. Interscholastic athletics, marching band, drill team and JROTC all depend on the process of building their programs. Without the critical ninth grade introduction, many of these students develop other interests, sometimes interests that we wish they would not develop.

Empty Parades

Finally, as a fellow elected official I can't resist reminding you – tongue in cheek – of the many parades that our communities promote and ask us to join. At the recent Presidential Inaugural Parade, it was the President's high school marching band and JROTC unit who proudly marched representing his hometown. As the Fourth of July parade approaches, please consider, do our communities really turn out to see us riding in those cars?

Again, we appreciate your understanding of the issue and its significance at the local level. If you or your staff has questions regarding our position, please contact me or our Legislative Affairs Manager, Mónica Henestroza, at (916) 529-5171.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Katherine Nakamura". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Katherine Nakamura
Trustee, Board of Education
San Diego Unified School District

Copy: Gerry Shelton, Chief Consultant, Assembly Education Committee
Chelsea Kelley, Consultant, Assembly Education Committee
Robert Becker, Policy Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus
Paul Navarro, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of the Governor
Mónica Henestroza, Legislative Affairs Manager, San Diego Unified School District