

**EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE**

**Congressman George Miller, Chairman**

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Thursday, July 24, 2008  
Press Office, 202-226-0853

**Chairman Miller Statement at Committee Hearing on “The Benefits of Physical and Health Education for Our Nation's Children”**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), the chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, for a committee hearing on “The Benefits of Physical and Health Education for Our Nation’s Children.”*

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Good Morning. Welcome to today’s hearing on “The Benefits of Physical and Health Education for Our Nation’s Children.”

In the past 30 years, the number of obese children has risen dramatically across the United States. The statistics are nothing short of alarming.

According to a recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 30 percent of U.S. schoolchildren are now obese. Since 1980, the percentage of 6-11 year olds who are classified as obese has almost tripled.

Overweight kids are now more vulnerable to diseases that once were a rarity among children, including type II diabetes, hypertension, and breathing irregularities while sleeping. Overweight children and adolescents are also at greater risk of developing heart disease, high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

This onslaught of obesity-related diseases also comes with dire financial consequences for our country. The CDC estimates that the cost of treating diseases linked to obesity grew by \$23 billion between 1995 and 2003.

In other words, it is clear that childhood obesity has become one of the most pressing challenges facing our nation. The question is: What are we going to do about it?

Today we will examine how we can best combat this staggering obesity epidemic and improve the health, well-being, and success of our schoolchildren.

While today’s hearing will focus primarily on how we can increase physical education in our schools, we know that improving exercise is only one half of the equation. Providing more nutritious foods for schoolchildren is also critical.

In preparation for next year’s reauthorization of our federal child nutrition programs, this Committee has been looking closely at how we can help schools offer healthy, low-cost meals that children will want to eat, and I hope today’s hearing helps inform this effort.

As a 2006 report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office concluded, the most important way to fight obesity is to increase physical exercise.

But unfortunately, America's children are less physically active than ever before. Children are spending more and more of their free time watching TV, surfing the internet, or playing video games. The typical American child now spends almost 45 hours a week using media outside of school.

Just last week, the National Institutes of Health released a new study showing that kids are exercising less intensely as they move into their teenage years.

At the very time that kids are exercising less, schools are also cutting back on recess and physical education classes.

Daily physical education classes, once routine in schools, are now offered by less than 10 percent of all public schools.

Although the National Association for Sport and Physical Activity recommends at least 150 minutes of exercise a week for elementary students, and 225 minutes a week for middle and high school students, most students face a starkly different reality.

A 2005 report by the National Center for Education Statistics shows that nationwide, public schools offer about 85 minutes of exercise for first-graders, and only about 98 minutes a week for sixth-graders.

This is disturbing on many levels. Multiple studies have shown that regular physical activity has positive effects on student learning.

Not only does consistent exercise help students succeed academically, but it can also strengthen their concentration levels and cognitive skills.

Given these trends, it is extremely disappointing that the Bush administration's latest – and final – budget eliminates federal funding that would help expand physical education programs in schools.

Schools are already being strained by skyrocketing food and energy prices and declining federal and state investments.

Terminating this vital grant program takes an unfair toll on schoolchildren – especially low-income children who often have fewer opportunities to exercise outside of school.

It goes without saying that the nation's child obesity crisis poses enormous threats to our long-term health and economic strength.

America needs and deserves a President who is committed to working to solve it.

Today we will hear from a panel of experts who are well aware of the benefits that physical and nutrition education can bring to our nation's students.

Each of you is a true leader in our efforts to fight child obesity, and I thank you for joining us today.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts. Thank you.

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