

Testimony of Mr. Tim Brown

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**Hearing on
*“The Benefits of Physical and Health Education for Our
Nation’s Children”***

**Committee on Education and Labor
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Thank you Mr. Chairman. My name is Tim Brown and I am grateful to you and members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify this morning about the health and fitness of America's youth.

During my football career and since, I have devoted much personal time to support youth development initiatives. I recognize I've been blessed with good health and a loving family, and I'm happy to have been able to give back in several ways. Our Mentoring Mini Camps take 100-150 fatherless boys each year and match them with role models while allowing them to have fun by playing football. Our Tim Brown Foundation runs a summer enrichment program which takes 175-200 kids for 10 weeks in the summer, all day, five days a week, and provides education, arts, sports and field trip opportunities for many who might otherwise be left with few healthy and fun choices in terms of how they spend their summertime. Since 1995 I've been the national chairman for Athletes and Entertainers for Kids/9-1-1 for Kids, which teaches kids how to handle emergency situations. Additionally, I work with the National Council of Youth Sports to increase funding and capacity for our nation's largest youth sports organizations.

I mention this brief background mostly to highlight some experience I bring to the discussion of children's well-being. In my view, our nation has to take immediate action to get our children to live more active and healthy lives. Providing quality daily physical education will go a long way to achieving this goal.

As a professional athlete, I have had the opportunity to speak to thousands of children. I'm saddened by how many children I meet every year who are struggling with being overweight or obese. At the same time, I'm struck by the dangerous number of kids who are not yet overweight but are headed down the road to ill health because they get so little physical activity and they have such unhealthy diets. Sedentary lifestyles mixed with bad food choices are too often the norm. The solution has to be focused on getting our kids to embrace regular exercise and good nutrition.

At the football camps in which I am involved, I see that kids just can't keep up like they used to. We have more kids every year who come to camp excited to play football, but who simply can't keep up with the basic drills once they get on the field. It's not just the seriously obese. In many cases, these are kids who look okay by appearance, but whose cardiovascular

endurance is so low they can't even play enough to enjoy the game. It's dangerous and sad.

It seems every day we see statistics and studies that make the same point. The percentage of obese children in America has tripled in past twenty years. The U.S. Surgeon General says obesity is the fastest growing cause of death and illness in America. Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Levitt says obesity and the inherent diseases that result have to be considered among our most significant health threats in this country.

Some are estimating that for the first time in our nation's history, today's young people could be the first generation of Americans to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents.

I'm sure this Committee knows most of these statistics and their implications. This is a serious situation. I applaud the Committee for this hearing and I hope your work will result in a greater commitment in America's schools to physical education and nutrition awareness.

The good news is that there is a tremendous amount of progress being made. Around the country, innovations in Physical Education are making a big difference. The School district of West Babylon, New York, after receiving a Carol White PEP grant, reported they "systematically changed their PE programs and have already seen a 2% drop in the overall obesity rate of their student population." When Miami Dade County Public Schools implemented the "Shaping The Future" program to help high school students make better fitness and nutrition choices, they registered significant improvements in fitness levels for a) least fit students; b) overweight and active; c) already relatively fit and active; d) African American and Latino; and e) males and females. In other words, a good innovative physical education program can improve the health of every student.

And the benefits go beyond immediate health measures. Most of us appreciate intuitively the old adage linking "sound mind and sound body." A 2002 California Department of Education Study found higher academic achievement was highly correlated with higher levels of physical fitness, to the point that the State Superintendent of Public Instruction said, "We now have the proof we've been looking for. Students achieve best when they are physically fit."

It is not science or math versus physical education. It is science and math and physical education. Provided together, a child will learn better.

Good physical education has been shown to promote good behavior. Within one year of implementing daily PE through the PE4Life program, inner-city Woodland Elementary in Kansas City, Missouri experienced a 67 percent decrease in disciplinary incidents resulting in out-of-school suspensions. The same PE4Life model is being considered for Chicago schools.

More good news is that there is a growing realization that everyone has a responsibility to address childhood inactivity. PE4Life, YMCA, American Heart Association, and National College of Sports Medicine are just a sampling of organizations doing wonderful work supporting quality physical education. Closer to my world, the National Football League launched “Play 60” last year, a national youth health and fitness campaign encouraging young people to be active at least 60 minutes a day. Play 60 incorporates “What Moves U”, a fitness promotion program of NFL Charities and the American Heart Association which has reached 25,000 middle schools.

Some of the best of today’s physical education programs reach kids where they are. They use technology to inspire and motivate them. Using heart rate monitors in physical education allows kids to understand and take control of their own fitness in ways they never could before. Appropriate technology also can attract kids who normally would not see themselves as athletic or sports-oriented. Across the country, schools are getting big groups of kids dancing, smiling and sweating through Dance Dance Revolution and similar technologies. We’re now seeing some video game companies creating games that force players to move around while they play. If it gets more people moving, I think it’s not a bad thing. The best PE programs will figure a way to incorporate such innovations into their curriculums. These should be supported.

In closing, I recognize this committee has a full plate in overseeing all the challenges facing our country’s education system. I urge you to recognize the overall value and priority of quality physical education and nutrition awareness in helping our children to live healthy, productive lives. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today.