Governor Quinn Signs P.E. Improvement Bills

Chicago, IL—August 4, 2014—Today, Governor Quinn signed two important bills that will improve physical education (P.E.) in Illinois schools to help students become fit for life. Professionally trained P.E. and health teachers will be recognized as “highly qualified,” similar to teachers of other subjects, under SB 3274, sponsored by Sen. Linda Holmes and Rep. Stephanie A. Kifowit. HB 5397, sponsored by Rep. Rita Mayfield and Sen. William Delgado, implements physical fitness assessments in all schools to help students set individual fitness goals and help teachers address individual student needs. The bill also creates a system to monitor the aggregate fitness levels of Illinois youth over time.

The Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity (IAPO), a statewide coalition advocating to reduce obesity through policy and environmental changes, praised Governor Quinn for supporting student health and fitness through these two measures.

“Fit kids learn better,” said Judy Tiggelaar of the Illinois Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance, one of the IAPO organizations that lead the efforts to pass these bills. “We know that quality physical education is linked to improved academic performance, classroom behavior, and health, and we’ve worked a long time to ensure our students have qualified P.E. teachers and understand the benefits of leading a fit and healthy lifestyle.”

The two bills reinforce Illinois as a leader in enhancing P.E.. The legislation builds on new P.E. and health learning standards adopted by the Illinois State Board of Education earlier this year. The new standards focus on fitness, and the connection between learning and fitness.

“These new laws are crucial to helping our children make healthy choices and improve their lifestyles from a young age,” said Heather Eagleton, Illinois Government Relations Director for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. “Each year, more than 585,000 Americans die from cancer, and one-third of these deaths are linked to poor diet, lack of physical activity and an unhealthy weight. Thanks to the efforts of the General Assembly, Illinois is making great strides in cancer prevention and health education.”

(continued)
“The enactment of these two bills represents a meaningful step forward in strengthening physical education in Illinois schools. PE is perhaps our most powerful weapon in the fight against the obesity epidemic plaguing our kids. We can use every bit of help we can get for what really is a life or death struggle for an entire generation," said Lynne T. Braun, PhD, CNP, chair of the Illinois Advocacy Committee for the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association. "With more and more kids being diagnosed with diabetes, high blood pressure, and other conditions previously seen mostly in older adults, the adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure has never been more pertinent than it is today. We are grateful to the state policymakers who voted for this legislation and to the Governor for acting on this imperative."

With advocates across the state, the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity is gearing up to support schools to implement these new laws and realize the multiple benefits of enhancing P.E.: improved health, improved learning, and improved behavior for Illinois children.

Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity: www.preventobesityil.org

The primary goal of the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity is to ensure that trends in obesity in Illinois are stable by 2015 and moving downward by 2018. The statewide coalition of over 140 organizations works to implement solutions to the obesity epidemic through coordinated and comprehensive policy, systems, and environmental changes.

###