

TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & THE CONNECTICUT INTERSCHOLASTIC
ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

RE: HB 5354 AAC ATHLETIC DIRECTOR AND INCORPORATING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INTO THE SCHOOL DAY

MONDAY, MARCH 5, 2012

Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Karissa Niehoff. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) and the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC). Our association provides professional development for school leaders- from aspirants to current principals and assistant principals. We also govern interscholastic athletics and student activities. Our membership includes ~900 schools- K-12; public, parochial, charter and magnet schools.

Part of our work at the CIAC is to provide training and guidance to our member school athletic directors specific to national federation rules for sport, state educational statutes, sports medicine research, and the many diverse challenges that the role of athletic director entails.

CAS and the CIAC support the concepts set forth in HB 5354- an Act Concerning Athletic Directors and Incorporating Physical Activity into the School Day.

First, we strongly believe that the position of athletic director requires a specific certification beyond that of a coach or teacher certification. Athletic Directors must coordinate, supervise, manage and evaluate a school wide education-based athletic program that serves students in a safe, professional, positive environment. Their duties include but are not limited to:

- Hiring, supervising and overseeing coaches, their performance and certification;
- Scheduling of practices and contests with other schools, securing officials, buses, and the support staff required at the numerous contests that occur in the same day;
- Attending constantly to the condition of facilities, fields, and equipment;
- Developing and implementing budgets which are often not sufficient to maintain programs;
- Constantly communicating with school personnel, community members, and media representatives;
- Assuring that all programs and personnel follow NFHS and CIAC rules and regulations.

The list certainly doesn't end here; next to the high school principal, the athletic director is arguably the busiest member of a school staff and works closely with the principal on a daily basis regarding issues that draw the highest public attention. The scope and significance of such administrative responsibilities requires more than experience required of a coaching certificate; an athletic director should hold a job-specific certification.

Second, CAS/CIAC strongly believes that healthy children learn better. We are very supportive of requirements that students participate in physical activity every day. At the same time, I also feel

strongly that the proposed language regarding physical activity needs to allow schools flexibility for the many unique situations that result in school days being very different from one another.

There is a wealth of research that links physical activity to cognitive performance. However, we recognize that there are days which simply may not allow for mandated recess time. Weather delays and early dismissals, mandatory testing days, school-wide assemblies, and other situations may cause a schedule to be disrupted. Rather than sacrificing precious academic time on such shortened days, educators may need to sacrifice recess time. Currently, over 70% of elementary schools offer daily recess. Schools that do not are challenged by academic needs, staffing shortages and contract issues.

This legislation is an example of a wonderful goal that needs to be carefully implemented. Whereas the school day is finite, adding 20 minutes of physical activity a day, must come from somewhere? The effect of subtracting those 20 minutes from other activities must be carefully considered so that we are not back before you in the future asking to add 20 minutes to another specific activity.

Therefore, if you are to favorably report HB 5384, we encourage you to consider language that allows schools to be flexible on unusually scheduled days and in situations when other issues might prevent a school from scheduling a recess period. CAS / CIAC stands ready to work with you to implement this important policy. We need your help to have the necessary flexibility to implement this in a manner that truly benefits our students.

This completes my testimony. Thank you for your consideration.