Purpose of Agenda Item

- To revisit issues associated with Physical Development and Health programs and physical education waiver requests, as directed by the Board during its January meeting.

Expected Outcome(s) of Agenda Item

- Board action on recommended legislative and program actions.

Background Information

Physical education programs in Illinois were first mandated in 1915, with districts expected to provide at least one hour of such training each week. In 1943, the law was revised to include, among other provisions, a requirement for daily physical education. This change reflected public and policymaker concern about the lack of fitness of young men and women called to service in World War II. The 1943 legislation, which is still a part of the School Code, attributed the following purposes to physical education courses:

To develop organic vigor;
To provide bodily and emotional poise;
To provide neuro-muscular training;
To prevent or correct certain postural defects;
To develop strength and endurance;
To develop desirable social and moral qualities;
To promote hygienic school and home life; and
To secure scientific supervision of the sanitation and safety of school buildings, playgrounds, athletic fields and equipment thereof. (School Code 27-7)
The laws regarding physical development and health require that

- local school boards “provide physical education and training” for all students “under their control;”
- public school students “engage daily, during the school day, in courses of physical education;” and
- the State Board of Education provide guidelines “in order to make effective the purposes” of the law and “see that the general provisions and intent…are enforced.”

Special activities in physical education must be provided for students “whose physical or mental condition…prevents their participation in the courses provided for normal children.”

The physical education program in grades 5 and 10 may include the health education course required in a separate statute (the “Critical Health Problems and Comprehensive Health Education Act”).

Local school boards may excuse students from daily physical education for the following reasons:

- In grades 11-12, for ongoing participation in an interscholastic athletic program;
- In grades 11-12, to enroll in academic classes required for admission to higher education, provided that failure to take the class will result in the student not being eligible for admission to the institution of his or her choice;
- In grades 11-12, to enroll in academic classes required for graduation, provided that failure to take the class will result in the student not being eligible to graduate;
- In grades 9-12, to participate in a marching band program offered for credit; or
- In grades 9-12, to participate in a school-sponsored Reserved Officer’s Training Corps (ROTC) program.

School boards that choose to exercise this authority must establish a policy to excuse students on an individual basis and the excuse must be based on a request from the student(s).

Through the state’s waiver process, local school boards may request approval to modify the manner in which they provide the physical education program or to waive such programs completely. P.E.-related requests have been the second most numerous of the waiver program.

In 1985, “Physical Development and Health” was identified as one of the six fundamental learning areas for Illinois students. In 1996, Illinois Learning Standards were developed for this area and a project to establish performance descriptors for the Physical Development and Health Standards and benchmarks is nearing completion.
Policy Issues

In a Standards-based educational system, there are three issues to be addressed by the State Board of Education:
- Ensuring Standards-based programs;
- Ensuring accountability for results; and
- Determining criteria for waivers.

Ensuring Standards-based Programs

A student’s ability to meet the Illinois Learning Standards is closely linked to the opportunities he or she has to develop the target knowledge and skills. Thus, one of the priorities of the State Board of Education has been to support local districts in aligning their instructional programs with the respective Learning Standards.

The Illinois Standards for Physical Development and Health call for students to:
- Acquire movement skills and understand concepts needed to engage in health-enhancing physical activity.
- Achieve and maintain a health-enhancing level of physical fitness based upon continual self-assessment.
- Develop team-building skills by working with others through physical activity.
- Understand principles of health promotion and the prevention and treatment of illness and injury.
- Understand human body systems and factors that influence growth and development.
- Promote and enhance health and well-being through the use of effective communication and decision-making skills.

There is no formal data about the extent to which physical education programs in Illinois schools have been aligned to these Standards. It is probably safe to assert that many programs are built around exercise and competitive games and address some -- though certainly not all -- of the Standards. There are undoubtedly a few programs that are best characterized as “rolling out the ball” -- programs that do little to target any of the Standards. At the other end of the continuum, there is a growing number of innovative programs, such as those described in the attached article from *Time* magazine, that are clearly aligned with the Standards.

The analysis of current alignment is complicated by the fact that there are schools in Illinois that are reported to be providing no physical education program at certain grade levels, even though they have not asked for a waiver, and/or to be providing programs that are so limited in time (e.g., once a week) that it would be extremely difficult for them to address the Standards in any meaningful way.
This variability is a special concern for health advocates, who are expressing alarm about the increase in obesity, heart problems and Type 2 diabetes among young people. Sources ranging from the U.S. Surgeon General to the Illinois Heart Association have called for urgent action to address these concerns, and they have given priority to the development of appropriate physical education programs in elementary and secondary schools.

But what is an appropriate physical education program? For many people, the mention of physical education evokes memories of endless push-ups and competitive activities that caused embarrassment and frustration for those who “weren’t good at games.” Representative Mary Lou Cowlischaw of Naperville was quoted in the *Time* article as saying that “P.E. the way it used to be probably should be abolished…The last person you wanted to be was the last one picked for a team.…”

However, the “New PE” programs described in *Time* and other reports are dramatically different from this remembered norm. The redesigned programs vary in specifics but have in common (1) a focus on health and fitness and (2) learning activities designed to build attitudes and skills for life-long implementation. Students monitor their heart rates, develop fitness through mountain biking, practice communication through journals, and learn teamwork through rope climbing. Many of these programs incorporate findings from brain research, which shows a strong connection between physical activity and learning. These programs also emphasize collaboration and decision-making, and, as noted in *Time*, support the philosophy that “Sportsmanship is rewarded; humiliation is unacceptable.” Such programs clearly provide a model for the future.

What actions are needed to strengthen physical education programs in Illinois and assure that they are in alignment with the Physical Development and Health Standards?

- Perceptions and expectations of physical education programs must be transformed. In particular, local board members, administrators, teachers and parents must understand the need for high-quality, Standards-based physical education and be willing to settle for nothing less.

- School districts must be provided with information and support that will help them align their programs with the Standards.

- Teachers must be provided with the knowledge and skills that will assure that they are able to teach Standards-based physical education.

The Illinois Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (IAHPERD) and the Illinois Heart Association (IHA) have offered to work with the State Board to develop and implement specific strategies to accomplish these three goals. Based on conversations to date, these strategies can be expected to include at least the following:
• develop and distribute informational materials,
• identify schools with exemplary physical education programs that can serve as demonstration sites or mentors,
• identify a cadre of consultants to work with local educators to re-design their programs or resolve specific problems, such as facility limitations,
• conduct workshops for teachers regarding the new performance indicators, and
• consult with teacher preparation programs to ensure that teacher candidates develop Standards-based instructional skills.

The State Board should take advantage of the expertise and commitment of these organizations and also work with other organizations interested in the issue. In addition, the Board should take advantage of the IAHPERD/IHA offer to help develop a proposal for federal funding if and when the new physical education grant program (PEP) is made available.

As these actions are pursued, it will be important to emphasize that the Board is not endorsing a particular program or program design. Illinois schools vary significantly in their resources and facilities, and it is not possible -- or even necessarily desirable -- for every district to provide climbing walls or mountain biking. The focus of the proposed improvement activities is to ensure that each school district designs its own physical education program in a way that directly and appropriately addresses all of the Learning Standards.

Ensuring Accountability for Results

A fundamental premise of a Standards-based educational system is that there must be accountability for results.

When the state assessment program was authorized in 1985, physical education and fine arts were treated differently than the other learning areas. Instead of including these two areas in the IGAP (now ISAT/PSAE), the legislation stated that “…the State Board shall establish standards and periodically, in collaboration with local school districts, conduct studies of student performance in the learning areas of fine arts and physical development/health.” This provision was based on the unique performance aspects of these learning areas and the projected costs and logistical challenges associated with trying to use traditional large-scale assessment techniques.

The State Board has addressed its responsibility for assessing knowledge and skills related to Physical Development and Health in the following ways.

• Test questions aligned to the Illinois Learning Standards in Physical Development and Health are included in the Science portion of the ISAT at grades 4 and 7. Five questions are aligned with the Physical
Development Standards and five are aligned with the Health Standards. Since there are five versions of the ISAT, there are a total of 50 questions.

- The ISAT results are to be reported back to the district in a format that allows them to review school and district performance in physical education/health. Although it is public information, these data have not been included on the Illinois School Report Cards.

- There has been no state level reporting of these data; however; this could be done.

- A voluntary Physical Development and Health test, aligned to the Illinois Learning Standards, has been developed by the State Board of Education for 9th and 10th grade students. The test was developed for local use only, to allow school districts to determine how well their students are meeting the Standards. One hundred and sixty high schools from all over the state, with a projected eligible population of 45,000 students, have requested the test for administration this spring. Depending on the preference of the school, it can be given to 9th graders, 10th graders or both. Upon receipt of the test data from schools, NCS Pearson will score the data and send individual student and school scores to participating schools. It would be inappropriate to report this information on the School Report Card.

- A one-time funding surplus (created by the transition to the PSAE) was used to purchase the Fitnessgram, a commercial fitness test produced by Human Kinetics. The tests were provided to a representative sample of local school districts last fall, and these districts will be surveyed in the spring to determine their use of and reaction to the test. Requests for the test exceeded availability by 3-1.

IAHPERD leaders believe that many local school districts in Illinois are regularly administering some form of fitness test, including the Fitnessgram, the Presidential Fitness Test, and tests that are teacher-designed.

In 1995, California mandated that local school districts administer a physical fitness test to all students in grades five, seven and nine, with data to be collected at least every two years. The California State Board of Education has designated the Fitnessgram as the required instrument. Testing is administered locally and results are reported to the State Department of Education. State, county and district reports are then provided on the state website. The spring 1999 results showed that only 20% of the more than one million students in the designated grades were able to meet the minimum fitness level.
Missouri has also mandated statewide assessment of physical fitness for students in fifth and ninth grade, beginning in 2001. This will complement that state’s written three-hour multiple-choice and essay physical education/health test, which has been voluntary but will be mandatory beginning this year (2001).

What actions are needed in Illinois to ensure accountability for results in relation to Physical Development and Health?

- Districts should be encouraged to include the results of the ISAT assessment of Physical Development and Health in their annual reports and the State Board should analyze and publish statewide data.

- All high schools should be urged to administer the voluntary physical development/health test to their 9th and/or 10th grade students and use the results for improving their programs. The State Board should look into the possibility of arriving at statewide data.

- All districts should be urged to administer an annual physical fitness test, chosen from among standardized tests developed by reputable companies, as part of their physical education programs. Results should be used at the local level to improve instruction and student performance, and districts should be urged to provide public reports about school or district fitness levels in a way that does not result in individual student identification.

- The State Board should encourage IAHPERD to develop systematic pilot testing of local fitness tests; that information should then be used by the Board and others to shape future decisions about a statewide fitness testing program.

Determining Criteria for Waivers

During the January meeting, State Board members indicated that they believed consideration of waivers should be linked directly to the Learning Standards.

Marilyn McConachie proposed that physical education waiver requests should be granted for one year only, on the following conditions:

- That the district has implemented an approved fitness assessment and presented baseline data on its students; and

- That waivers will be renewed only if students’ level of fitness shows improvement.

Other Board members concurred with the direction of this recommendation but asked staff to review the implications and provide a response at the next meeting.
The State Board has authority to approve modifications of state law or waivers of its own regulations, but it cannot approve or disapprove waivers of law. In those circumstances, the Board makes a recommendation to the General Assembly for its consideration.

Against that background, what actions are needed to establish a Standards-based rationale for waivers of physical education?

- The State Board of Education should adopt the following policy to guide its consideration of all requests for waiver or modification of law and regulation in relation to physical education.
  - Physical Development and Health has been designated in law as a fundamental learning area and relevant Learning Standards have been established. If a district wants to waive the law that requires instruction in this learning area, that district should be able to show that its students are meeting the Standards or that the district is addressing the Standards in a manner other than that prescribed in law. If a district is given a waiver for physical education, it should be for a limited time (no more than two years) and any request for its renewal should be accompanied by evidence that the district’s students are still able to meet the Standards.

- The State Board should request information from districts regarding the extent to which their students are meeting the Standards. This information should inform the staff response to requests to waive regulations or modify the law, as well as the Board’s determination of its recommendations to the General Assembly regarding waiver of law.

- The Board should support legislation consistent with its policy.

A number of procedural concerns about the waiver process were raised last summer during public hearings regarding P.E. waivers. These were discussed with the Board in January and have now been addressed through proposed rule revisions presented in a separate document. The recommendations call for submission to the State Board of (1) copies of the hearing notice provided to the public and the bargaining agent (already required by law) and (2) a description of the hearing on the proposed waiver. The proposal is designed to affect all waiver requests, not just those related to physical education.

**Budget and Legislative Implications**

The recommendations in this report have implications for both immediate and future legislative action. However, many if not most of the proposed actions can be taken without additional legislative authority.
On the other hand, the proposed actions will require resources in terms of staff and funding. The assistance and collaboration offered by IAHPERD and the Illinois Heart Association may help in that regard, particularly with respect to program improvement activities. However, given the Board’s many other commitments and obligations, the extent to which some of the proposed actions are eventually implemented will necessarily be determined by the availability of resources.

**Recommendation**

The State Board of Education should authorize staff to implement the recommendations in this report regarding Standards-based programs, assessment of results, and waiver criteria.

**Next Steps**

Consistent with Board action, staff will continue discussions with IAHPERD and the Heart Association and begin implementation of the recommendations in this report.