



TEXAS PUBLIC HEALTH COALITION

House Public Education Committee

House Bill 400 by Rep. Rob Eissler

March 15, 2011

Presented by: Texas Medical Association, Texas Pediatric Society, Texas Academy of Family Physicians, and the Texas Public Health Coalition

The Texas Medical Association, the Texas Pediatric Society, and the Texas Academy of Family Physicians believe promoting physical activity on school campuses is a key to preventing obesity among our Texas children. Our organizations, which represent more than 48,000 physicians and medical students in the state along with the thousands of public health advocates that compose the Texas Public Health Coalition, oppose the Fitnessgram reductions proposed in HB 400 by Chairman Eissler.

The state of Texas is suffering from an obesity epidemic, which is most glaring among our youth. Obesity usually begins in childhood. Obese children have an 80-percent chance of staying obese their entire lives. The average lifetime cost of obesity is more than half a million dollars for an obese child who remains obese throughout adulthood. **In Texas, the numbers are staggering. Forty percent of children are either overweight or obese.**

A survey conducted by the Cleveland Clinic revealed that most Americans believe their health is good. Thirty percent of those surveyed gave themselves an “A” on personal health while most of their doctors gave them a “C” or lower. Although a child might appear to be healthy, his or her condition can be determined only by measuring various aspects of the child’s physical condition. Fitnessgram, a physical education assessment and reporting program required under current law for children in grades 3 through 12, measures a child’s aerobic capacity, muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility and body composition.

As outlined in HB 400, the Fitnessgram assessment would only apply to children in physical education courses. That works for elementary school children because they’re required to take physical education each year. In middle school, children are in physical education courses four out of six semesters, so the change will still capture a majority of students. However, at the high school level, students are required to take only one credit of physical education, and most qualify for a physical education credit while taking another approved course such a team sport or marching band.

Pediatricians and family physicians routinely care for high school athletes who are in poor health. Many spend hours in the gym training but never receive proper education on the nutrition

necessary to support their activity or how to exercise and eat once the season abruptly ends. It is poor judgment to assume that all Texas children participating in athletics or an approved course substitute are physically fit and don't need further assessment.

Research undeniably reveals a direct correlation between physical fitness and academic achievement. Further, fit students have fewer problems with absenteeism and behavior problems. Fitnessgram results from a district can be reviewed after assessment. Administrators and teachers from a low-performing school can compare their programs with physical education programs from higher-performing schools, even on a state or national level. Just as school administrators can look at TAKS scores and pinpoint low scores and identify where additional resources should be allocated, Fitnessgram scores can be compared between schools.

Capturing Fitnessgram data at regular intervals for all students, including those in high school, is not only an important tool for schools in enhancing their own performance standards but also a key to promoting a healthy future for Texas. Texas physicians see the health effects of childhood obesity every day, including 9 and 11 year olds with newly diagnosed type II diabetes and 8 year olds with high blood pressure — all a result of their obesity. Ultimately, it is more expensive to treat an obese adult than provide primary prevention for children. A 2003 study in the *Obesity* research journal concluded that \$14 a year invested in student nutrition and physical activity programs can save more than \$15,000 in medical costs and over \$25,000 in loss-of-productivity costs associated with adult obesity. There is no better time than now to make decisions that will improve both the academic future of our students as well as the physical and fiscal health of our state.

We respectfully urge you to oppose the proposed Fitnessgram reductions in HB 400.