

**SUBJECT:** Daily physical activity in public school physical education curriculum

**COMMITTEE:** Public Education — favorable, without amendment

**VOTE:** 5 ayes — Sadler, Dunnam, Hochberg, Oliveira, Olivo  
1 nay — Smith  
3 absent — Dutton, Grusendorf, Hardcastle

**SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, April 11 — 29-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar

**WITNESSES:** For — Hugo Berlanga, Christus Children’s Hospital; Jean Blaydes, Action Based Learning; Diana Everett, Texas Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance; Missi Fullar  
Against — None

**BACKGROUND:** Education Code, sec. 28.002 defines the required curriculum that each school district offering kindergarten through grade 12 must provide. Weekly or daily physical education classes were required until 1995, when the Education Code was revised to give school districts local control over their curriculum. Physical education now is considered to be a part of the enrichment curriculum, and, as such, is not a required course. Chapter 38 sets forth provisions for the health and safety of public school students.

**DIGEST:** SB 19 would amend sec. 28.002 to allow the State Board of Education (SBOE) to adopt a rule to require students enrolled in kindergarten through sixth grade in an elementary school to participate in daily physical activity as part of the school district’s physical education curriculum. If the SBOE adopted such a rule, the rule would have to provide an exemption for a student who was unable to participate in daily physical activity because of illness or disability.  
  
The bill would add sec. 38.013 to establish a coordinated health program for elementary school students. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) would have to provide each school district a coordinated health program designed

to prevent obesity, cardiovascular disease, and type II diabetes in elementary school students. The TEA would have to notify every school district of the availability of the program, which would provide coordination in:

- ! health education;
- ! physical education and physical activity;
- ! nutrition services; and
- ! parental involvement

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2001, and would apply beginning with the 2001-2002 school year.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

SB 19 is needed to encourage schools to offer physical education activities to an increasingly sedentary and unhealthy population of school age children. Although no specific figures are available for Texas, the Centers for Disease Control cited that 42 percent of students attended daily physical education class in 1991. By 1997, that number had declined to 27 percent. Nationwide, school districts are reducing or eliminating physical education classes because they are strapped for funds and want to focus school time on academics. Gradually, Texas school districts also have neglected the physical health and physical education of their school children. To squeeze in more class time, some area schools even have eliminated recess.

Experts say that children who exercise regularly get better exam results. A definite link exists showing that children who get physical activity three or four times a week also perform better in the classroom. Research suggests that those children who are active get more oxygen to the brain.

Texas is experiencing epidemic levels of adolescent obesity because of dwindling physical activity and poor health and nutrition habits. Two recent studies show that between 20 and 25 percent of Texas elementary school children are clinically obese. These children are developing serious health problems at an early age, problems that were once limited to adults, such as type II diabetes and premature heart disease. Not only is this a concern for every child, but it also poses a threat to the future of Texas. If children do not learn healthy habits when they are young, they will grow up to be sick

adults. If 25 percent of our workforce were prematurely disabled due to complications from diabetes, cardiovascular disease, heart attack or stroke, the price would be enormous in terms of lost productivity, increased burden on the health care system, not to mention the human costs.

A lack of physical education requirements in Texas schools is fueling this crisis. National guidelines recommend that elementary school children receive 150 minutes per week of exercise, while middle and high school children should receive 225 minutes per week. In fact, after waivers and substitutions for drill team, marching band, and career and technology work-based training courses, only 20 percent of Texas high school students actually take physical education classes in any given year.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

State law requires school districts to teach English, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies as well as other subjects. As TAAS test requirements get more difficult every year, schools have been forced to use limited resources for academics and less for physical education classes. A lack of money, overly tight schedules, and the pressure to devote more time to academics are the primary reasons physical education classes have been reduced. Some schools are scheduling more time for reading, writing, math, and social studies because those are the subjects on which students are tested as part of the state's accountability system.

School districts should retain the flexibility to set their own curriculum to meet local needs. Some school districts have taken steps to address health concerns by eliminating deep-fat fryers from cafeteria kitchens and adding fresh fruit and salad bars in lunchrooms. Others have recess but it varies campus to campus. In any event, it should be left up to the local entities to design a schedule that would allow for more physical education, if that is what parents and educators want.

OTHER  
OPPONENTS  
SAY:

Requiring schools to offer physical education classes without additional financial resources would create another unfunded mandate. Desperation for funding has led many districts to raising money from soft drink companies and fast food vendors on campuses, who have a captive audience of buyers. Until the state faces up to the severe problem of public financing of education and finds more state dollars for schools, local educators should retain the discretion to determine how best to bring students up to academic

speed and let parents worry about whether their children are getting enough exercise.