

- SUBJECT:** Requiring an interim study on nutrition in public schools
- COMMITTEE:** Public Health — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — Capelo, Truitt, Coleman, Dawson, McReynolds, Naishtat, Zedler
1 nay — Laubenberg
1 absent — Taylor
- SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, May 14 — voice vote
- WITNESSES:** For — Brad Shields, Texas Association of School Boards; Linda Greene
Against — John Moore, Galena Park ISD
- DIGEST:** SB 474 would establish a joint interim committee comprising the commissioners of education, public health, and agriculture; three members of each house of the Legislature; one physician who provides services to school-aged children; one member with expertise in nutrition; one parent of a school-aged child; and one school superintendent or principal. The committee could consult with the School Health Advisory Committee to carry out its duties.
- To the extent that funds were available, the committee would have to study the following areas:
- the nutritional content of food and beverages served to children in schools;
 - the long-term impact of obesity in public school children;
 - the value of a universal breakfast and lunch program; and
 - school contracts for food or vending machines, including potential conflicts of interest, revenue from the contracts, and impact on the school food service program.
- To the extent that funds were available, the committee would have to report the study results to the governor and the Legislature by October 1, 2004.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 474 would set the state in the right direction for addressing childhood obesity. Texas is experiencing epidemic levels of adolescent obesity because of poor health and nutrition habits and dwindling physical activity, but the state does not have all the information it needs to set effective policy to combat this epidemic. The interim study proposed by this study would collect the information Texas needs to ensure that new policies would be successful and would not harm stakeholders, such as the schools or districts.

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, including problems that once were 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 the state's workforce were disabled prematurely by complications from diabetes, heart disease, or stroke, the price would be enormous in terms of lost productivity and increased burden on the health-care system, not to mention the human costs.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

SB 474 would do nothing to combat obesity. Academicians, public policy analysts, and politicians across the nation have studied this phenomenon and offered many examples of best practices that could be implemented. Studying the issue for two more years would be equivalent to doing nothing at all. Making the interim committee's work contingent on available funding would seal the committee's fate. Neither the House nor the Senate budget proposals include funding for the advisory committee.

**OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Childhood obesity would be addressed better at the local level. 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 offer recess periods, though the practice varies from campus to campus. Local entities should design their own programs to encourage better nutrition or more physical education, if that is what parents and educators want.