April 4, 2019

Chair Taylor and Senate Education Committee Members:

The Texas Public Health Coalition, representing more than 30 health professional and health-focused organizations dedicated to disease prevention and health promotion, and Partnership for a Healthy Texas, a coalition of more than 50 organizations dedicated to reducing obesity in Texas, are grateful for the opportunity to comment on SB 1376. Our two coalitions write today to express concerns with the proposed elimination of FitnessGram physical fitness assessments in public schools.

Obesity is a serious condition affecting over 600,000 Texas youth.\(^1\) Children with obesity miss more school and perform less well academically than normal-weight peers,\(^2\) and are at risk for negative health outcomes later in life.\(^3\) Schools play a critical role in helping students establish healthy behaviors, which support academic achievement and overall well-being.

FitnessGram is administered to students already enrolled in a physical education course, and measures physical fitness components including aerobic capacity, muscular strength, and body composition. Annual fitness testing provides valuable information that can engage students and their parents in monitoring the student’s individual fitness level and goals. The information also guides educators and community leaders in designing and targeting interventions to help improve the health and academic success of our students. Further, having concrete data on youth fitness in a community helps secure funding for community-level public health programming.

Fitness assessments continue to be a critical tool for monitoring obesity in our state. We share the committee’s goal to improve schools’ ability to focus on student achievement, and would like to underscore for the committee both the academic benefits to physical activity\(^4\) and economic gains that could be realized from reducing obesity statewide.\(^1\) We hope the committee will consider retaining this important tool so we can continue to address the serious problem of obesity in Texas.

Thank you for your consideration.

---


