

RECOMMENDATIONS



SCHOOL HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

1. Allow TEA to use student-level FitnessGram data to assess the relationship between physical fitness and academic performance.

- TEA should share encrypted student-level FitnessGram data with the Comptroller so that it can be integrated with other student and community data to identify areas within school districts appropriate for intervention grants.
- The Comptroller would partner with individual districts to obtain other specific data to be used in the GIS-based analysis.
- Schools could integrate student FitnessGram data with TAKS academic achievement, absenteeism, demographic and student Zip code data.
- If FitnessGram results are linked with other PEIMS data, TEA could correlate fitness data with academic data and make them available to parents.

2. Partner with the private sector, federal legislators, associations and other advocates to develop strategies to promote healthy eating and physical activity.

- Launch an obesity and wellness information portal on the Comptroller's website to provide a clearinghouse of information and resources to children, parents, schools, businesses, state agencies and the general public.
- Work with the food, beverage, media and entertainment industries to promote healthy foods and drinks marketed to children, particularly during prime TV viewing time for children.
- Work with School Health Advisory Committees (SHACs) to disseminate information and best practices in obesity prevention to schools.



All providers receiving grants would be required to collect and provide data measuring the **results** of their programs.

The **FitnessGram**, a physical fitness test, has revealed that fitness levels decline as students get older.

3. Recognize schools for achievements and improvements made in health, fitness and wellness.

- Implement a School Wellness Awards program rewarding schools with innovative and effective nutrition and fitness programs.
- Potential categories for wellness awards include school meals, physical activity, nutrition education and wellness programs.

4. Improve nutrition and physical activity in early childhood programs, including support for the use of dietary guidelines in childcare settings.

- Urge the state's Early Childhood Health and Nutrition Interagency Council, enacted in 2009, to draft nutrition and physical activity policies, standards and requirements for programs involving children less than six years of age and provide them to schools and parents for comment by the beginning of the 2011-12 school year.
- The council then should finalize the draft in time to notify early childhood medical and educational program leaders by May 2012 that these policies, standards and requirements will become effective for the 2012-13 school year.

5. The Legislature should fund intervention grants for middle schools identified as "high risk" for obesity by incorporating FitnessGram data with an obesity data system to be developed by the Comptroller's office.

- The Comptroller would integrate student-level FitnessGram data with student location and demographic data as well as other community data (proximity of grocery stores, fast foods, athletic fields, medical facilities, etc.) to pinpoint geographic areas within school districts and locate at-risk schools suitable for intervention grants.
- The Comptroller would administer a competitive grant program to provide funding for proven obesity intervention and prevention programs in areas identified as "hot spots" by the agency's geographic information system (GIS). All providers receiving grants would be required to collect and provide data measuring the results of their programs.
- The Comptroller also would develop a website to provide a clearinghouse of obesity-related information and programs to schools and families (see Recommendation #2, page 5).

6. Urge Texas legislators to restore the high school PE graduation requirement to 1.5 credits.

- During the last legislative session, H.B. 3 reduced the PE credits required for graduation from 1.5 to one.
- The FitnessGram physical fitness test has revealed that fitness levels decline as students age. For example, while 21 percent of seventh-grade girls and 17 percent of seventh-grade boys met the standard, among high school seniors only 8 percent of girls and 9 percent of boys fell into the "fit" category.

7. Urge Texas legislators to expand middle-school physical education requirements.

- Legislators should be urged to require physical education in all six semesters of middle school. Current law requires daily physical activity in only four out of six semesters.

8. Encourage school districts to send parents a “fitness report card” based on FitnessGram data.

- SHACs should work with school districts to provide a fitness report card to parents.



COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENTAL SERVICES

9. Encourage schools to make facilities available before and after school for use by the school community and community-based organizations for intramural physical activity programs.

10. Urge Texas senators and representatives in the U.S. Congress to propose changes to the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), limiting or curbing the eligibility of unhealthy food items.

- According to the federal Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, soft drinks, candy, cookies, snack crackers, and ice cream are eligible items under SNAP.

11. Encourage farmer’s markets to accept SNAP benefits (food stamps/Lone Star Cards) as payment.

- Farmer’s markets promote nutrition through the purchase of locally grown fruits and vegetables, which are fresher than those transported long distances.
- Texas has a pilot program to provide farmer’s markets with wireless card readers, but many still lack the ability to accept the Lone Star Card.
- A farmer’s market must be licensed by USDA’s Food and Nutrition Services Division to become eligible to accept the SNAP card.

12. Encourage policies in cities and counties that encourage walking and bicycling for health, transportation and recreation.

- Students should have a safe place to exercise and play and a safe walk to school.
- Support city and county efforts to improve neighborhood safety and use healthy urban design strategies.

13. The Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) should focus research grant funding on proposals that study the link between obesity and cancer, based on feedback and findings from the RFI issued in August 2010.



Many Texas farmers
markets still lack
the ability to accept
the **Lone Star Card**.



Vending machines could provide a “Red, Yellow, Green” **labeling** program for their selections



14. Create a task force of health care and insurance providers to determine ways in which their industries can provide obesity prevention and intervention services to patients and policyholders.

- Encourage insurance providers to reimburse members’ costs for exercise classes, gym memberships and nationally recognized weight loss programs such as Weight Watchers, Jenny Craig and NutriSystem if members lose a specified amount of weight or reach goal weight within specific timeframes.
- Encourage physicians to prescribe diet and exercise as viable treatments (including weight loss programs, gym memberships, exercise classes and exercise equipment) for patients diagnosed as obese or overweight, with insurance companies covering prescribed costs accordingly.
- Encourage pediatricians to diagnose “obese” or “overweight” children according to their body mass index (BMI) and prescribe a treatment plan of diet and exercise with regular checkups on progress.

15. The state should encourage the restaurant industry to list calories and nutrition content on menu items.

- Calorie information should be included on menus, counter signage, websites and on customer receipts.
- Vending machines could provide a “Red, Yellow, Green” labeling program for their selections.
- Restaurants that share nutrition information effectively could be recognized or featured in some way as positive examples.