

Revenue Neutral Policy Solutions to Youth Fitness Problems in Texas

A follow-up report to RGK FOUNDATION's
Stuck in the Middle: Choosing Health or Education. Texas Middle School Physical Education

Critical decisions are being made regarding **financing**¹ of public schools and the fitness of Texas middle school children. These decisions can have long-term **consequences**². After all, research shows that physically fit children become fit adults and are more likely to be better parents, citizens, employees, and entrepreneurs. Further, a recent Texas study concluded fitness is strongly related to academic performance (**Van Dusen, 2011**)³

Yet, at a time of unprecedented school budget cuts and soaring obesity rates, it's easy to feel *Stuck in the Middle*⁴. We all understand the health and fitness challenges facing Texas youth, but we don't know how to move forward without greater funding.

An exhaustive search was conducted to identify evidence-based, practical, revenue-neutral solutions to improve the fitness of middle school children. Physical activity policies from every **state**⁵ were examined, as were reports published in scientific journals. Physical activity leaders from over 100 Texas school districts weighed in on the solutions.

Solving Texas obesity and fitness problems won't be free, easy, or achieved overnight. But dedicated individuals and compassionate organizations never stand still. This report describes six policy actions to push forward.

Texas has always led the nation in physical education and school health, but other states have caught up. **IT'S TIME**⁶ for Texas to regain **leadership** in physical activity programs and policies.

6 Whole Middle School Physical Activity Actions



High Expectations. Aim for 60 minutes of daily of physical activity for students; 20 minutes for school staff.

Joint Land-Use Agreements. Encourage community groups to operate sport or physical activity programs on school property.

Brain Activity Breaks. Students should not remain seated longer than 60 minutes. Short activity breaks are recommended (5-15 min).

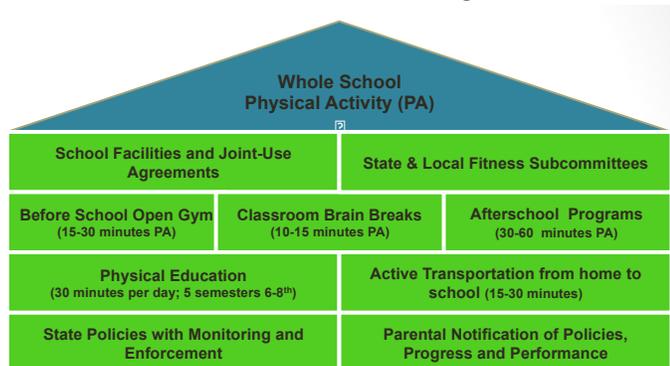
Transparency. Place Texas Education Code and school district physical activity policies in public view. Inform parents of their child's fitness score.

Planning. Commission a fitness planning team within each existing local School Health Advisory Council (SHAC), including the state SHAC.

Expand. Implement physical education in 5 of the 6 semesters in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades.

The 2011 TX legislative session presented massive school budget cuts with severe implications for physical activity: larger class sizes, fewer PE professionals, less instructional equipment, and less fit and less academically prepared children. In the budget deficit environment, several good bills failed⁷; however, SB 226 succeeded⁸ in requiring improvements in fitness reporting.

Rather than categorical or piecemeal policy recommendations, this report identifies 6 revenue neutral *Whole School* physical activity recommendations for the 2013 legislative session.



A *Whole School* perspective understands the physical, social, and cognitive benefits of physical activity and seeks improvements across the entire campus, not only in physical education.

High Expectations. Aim for 60 minutes of daily student physical activity at middle school and 20 minutes for school staff. Physical activity and fitness are essential for the achievement of academic excellence.

Details

- The 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines⁹ for Americans recommend 60 minutes of physical activity for youth and 20–45 minutes for adults.
- Fit children are better learners¹⁰ and score higher on standardized tests.
- Fit school staff¹¹ are excellent role models, more collegial, more energetic, absent less often, and have fewer health problems¹².

Policy Implications

- Modify Texas Education Code §28.002¹³ to increase physical activity requirements from 30 to 60 minutes per day using *Whole School* strategies.

Joint Land-Use Agreements. School boards should implement joint land-use agreements for community-school shared usage. Public schools are community resources¹⁴; children and adults should have access¹⁵ to athletic fields & gymnasium facilities.

Details

- Joint land use agreements¹⁶ increase youth physical activity, especially in low-income¹⁷, inner city and rural settings that lack other resources.

Policy Implications

- School boards should encourage joint land-use agreements¹⁸ for public use and as a revenue source.

Brain Activity Breaks. School boards should adopt twice-daily “brain activity breaks.” Brain breaks¹⁹ improve cognitive functioning and academic achievement, and provide additional minutes of physical activity²⁰.

Details

- Middle schools often employ 90-minute block schedules where students sit for long periods without physical activity breaks.
- Brain breaks²¹ are 5–15 minute activities designed to join academic and physical skills together.
- Brain breaks²² help students refocus and stay fresh by breaking up the class and changing the pace.

Policy Implications

- Modify Texas Education Code §38.014²³ to include brain activity breaks as part of Coordinated School Health and as a method to meet Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (§116.21-24)²⁴.
- Require teacher certification and professional development in implementation and delivery of brain activity breaks.

Transparency. Ensure parents are informed of state physical activity requirements, local school progress, and their child’s fitness performance. Informed parents, teachers, and school administrators make better decisions.

Details

- Few school administrators, and even fewer parents, know the Texas Education Code policies that govern physical activity.
- Annual physical fitness assessments are required in Texas schools in grades 3–12, §38.101-38.106²⁵. Parents can request their child’s fitness results, but results are not automatically provided.
- Parents cannot make informed decisions without accurate information.

Policy Implications

- Modify Texas Education Codes §38.101–03²⁵ to require that a “fitness report card” be sent home. It should include state and school district physical activity policies.
- Modify §38.101–03²⁵ to require public reporting of school fitness results via news outlets, online, at school SHAC, and to the school board.
- Texas physical education policy should be a required component at new teacher orientation.

Planning. State and local School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs) should commission fitness planning teams.

Details

- Texas Education Code §38.058²⁶ requires the establishment of a SHAC in each school district.
- Physical activity and fitness are not required SHAC topic areas.

Policy Implications

- Modify §38.058²⁶ to require a physical activity and fitness planning team on each local SHAC, and the TX SHAC.
- School campus improvement plans (CIPs) should include goals to improve physical activity and fitness.
- Schools falling below an overall 50% passing Healthy Fitness Zone should report their remediation plan to their local SHAC and school board.

Expand. Physical education should be required 5 semesters across 6–8th grades.

Details

- Texas Education Code requires 30 minutes of daily physical education in middle schools (§28.002²⁷) in four of six semesters (grades 6–8).
- Physical education is essential training for the development of a lifelong physical activity.

Policy Implications

- Modify §28.002²⁷ to require daily physical education in five of six semesters across 6, 7, & 8th grades.



Embedded Weblinks

1. <http://www.texatribune.org/texas-education/public-education/texas-teachers-say-classes-growing-layoffs-widespr/>
2. <http://www.texatribune.org/texas-education/public-education/texas-schools-face-strict-rules-financial-hardship/>
3. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2011.00652.x/full>
4. http://www.rgkfoundation.org/pdf/2010_Kelder.pdf
5. <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/DNPAleg/index.asp>
6. <http://www.itstimesummit.org/>
7. <http://msdcenter.blogspot.com/p/current-bills.html>
8. <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=82R&Bill=SB226>
9. <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/physicalactivity/guidelines.htm>
10. http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/
11. <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/hwi/aboutus/index.htm>
12. <http://www.schoolempwell.org/c/awards.web?nocache@1+s@Lhjd00d4Df1.o>
13. <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.28.htm#28.002>
14. http://www.activelivingresearch.org/files/Spengler_AJHP_2007.pdf
15. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1748-720X.2007.00118.x/abstract>
16. <http://www.nplanonline.org/nplan/joint-use>
17. http://www.impactteen.org/journal_pub/pub_PDFs/EBPM-1-2-Powell%20et%20al1.pdf
18. <http://www.jointuse.org/resources/make-joint-use-happen/joint-use-agreement-checklist/>
19. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S009174351100491>
20. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0091743511000533>
21. [http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(10\)00558-1/abstract](http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(10)00558-1/abstract)
22. <http://www.eatsmartmovemoreenc.com/Energizers/Middle.html>
23. <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.38.htm#38.014>
24. <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter116/ch116b.html>
25. <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.38.htm#38.101>
26. <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.38.htm#38.058>
27. <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.28.htm#28.002>
28. <https://sph.uth.tmc.edu/campuses/austin/>
29. <https://sph.uth.tmc.edu/research/centers/dell/>
30. <https://twitter.com/#!/drstevekelder>

Additional Resources

1. www.activeandhealthyschools.com
2. www.activelivingresearch.org/resourcesearch
3. <http://www.aahperd.org/about/districts/>
4. <http://www.tahperd.org/>
5. <http://www.healthiergeneration.org/>
6. <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/>
7. <http://www.greenribbonschools.org/>
8. <http://www.livesmarttexas.org/>
9. <http://www.partnershipforahealthytexas.org/>
10. www.physicalactivityplan.org
11. <http://www.healthcare.gov/prevention/nphpphc/strategy/index.html>
12. <http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/default.aspx>
13. <http://www.rwjf.org/childhoodobesity/>

RGK Foundation commissioned this report as part of its efforts to improve physical activity, reduce childhood obesity, and diminish health disparities in Texas. This report, with weblink referencing, can be accessed at the RGK Foundation website: <http://www.rgkfoundation.org/>.

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Dr. Kelder invites you to ask questions or comment about child health on his [Twitter](#)³⁰ and LinkedIn accounts.

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