



SB 530 by Nelson Re: Daily Physical Activity in Schools
Senate Education Committee
March 15, 2007

Chairwoman Shapiro and members, I am Jodie Smith, the Public Policy Coordinator at Texans Care For Children. We are a non-profit organization composed of over 120 organizations and individuals working to improve the well-being of Texas' children. Texans Care For Children's Board is composed of leaders from across the state representing various sectors including business, church, professional, volunteer and non-profit organizations. We advocate for state and local policy that brings about a better quality of life for the children of our state. Each session, in concert with our membership, we develop a legislative agenda that supports efforts to improve the lives of Texas' children in six areas: child poverty, child health care, child mental health, early care and education, child welfare, and juvenile justice. Thank you for taking my testimony today on SB 530.

Why does the issue of Child Obesity deserve your attention today?

The prevalence of obesity in Texas children is among the highest in the nation. Texas data shows that 23% of 4th graders, 20% of 8th graders, and 19% of 11th graders are overweight or obese, which is approximately 25% higher than the national average for elementary school children and 14% higher for secondary children. http://www.eatsmartbeactivetx.org/data_state_child

Children who are overweight at the age of 12 are 75% more likely to be overweight as an adult. Children who engage in daily physical activity are more likely to remain active throughout their lives.

Recent reductions in rates of child overweight among Texas fourth graders demonstrate the importance of daily physical activity. It is critical to expand current policies that require physical activity for elementary students into middle schools and high schools where many students do not engage in daily physical activity and where overweight and obesity rates continue to increase.

Three out of the five leading causes of death in Texas (heart disease, stroke, and cancer) are related to obesity. The diseases associated with obesity are increasing at the same rate as obesity, and the demand for treatment for these conditions is beginning to overburden the health care system. The medical costs

for obesity are projected to quadruple from \$10 billion to \$40 billion by 2040 in Texas alone. Chronic diseases related to obesity found primarily among adults are being diagnosed in children at alarming rates. In a study released by the National Conference of State Legislatures, 61% of overweight 5- to 10-year-olds already had at least one risk factor for heart disease, and 26% had two or more risk factors.

Our schools are bearing the brunt of this epidemic. Average size school districts in Texas lose approximately \$95,000 of state aid per year due to the rate of absenteeism among overweight students, who are four times more likely to miss school compared to students of normal weight. A single day absence costs school districts \$9-\$20 per student.

Child obesity has long-term affects on tomorrow's workforce and the fiscal health of the state. A research study found that annual medical expenses for Dallas city employees was significant higher for overweight (\$573) and obese employees (\$620) compared to expenses for employees with a normal weight (\$114).

Why does Texans Care support SB 530?

Texans Care for Children strongly supports this legislation because it:

- Gives rulemaking authority over daily physical activity to the Texas Education Agency;
- Emphasizes the importance of daily physical activity for every student K-8 every day;
- Strengthens the definition of daily physical activity and requires the time to be at least 30 minutes per day;
- Ensures that recess is not used to fulfill the 135 minutes per week physical activity requirement;
- Requires physical fitness assessment of all students K-12; and
- Increases accountability measures for school districts and for the Texas Education Agency concerning child overweight and obesity.

Thank you again for your time, interest, and commitment. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 512.473.2274 or visit our website at www.texanscareforchildren.org.

Respectfully,
Jodie Smith
Public Policy Coordinator
jsmith@texanscareforchildren.org