

## FACT SHEET

### **Penny Wise and Pound (\$/lb) Foolish: Why Eliminating or Suspending the Physical Performance Test Mandates (K-12) Will Have a Negative Economic and Health Impact on the State**

#### PROBLEM:

**The California Legislature is now considering whether to suspend the State Mandates for the Physical Performance Tests (K-12).**

The Legislature's consideration of Physical Performance Tests is likely based on questionable rationale provided in a report from the California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO). On February 2, 2010, the LAO published a report titled *Education Mandates: Overhauling a Broken System* that provides budget recommendations to the state legislature. One of the recommendations is the elimination of the mandates for the Physical Performance Tests, which the LAO estimates would save the state \$2,325,000. This funding is described in the Report as necessary to reimburse local education agencies for costs related to the mandated Physical Performance Tests: *"Purchase equipment, train staff, conduct assessments, analyze assessment data, and respond to state agency requests associated with administering physical fitness tests in grades five, seven, and nine."*

The LAO rationale for recommending the elimination of the mandate is stated as follows: *"Minimal impact expected. The state already requires two years of physical education in high school and has well-developed curriculum standards for middle school. Data are not used to improve education practices."* The LAO report further states: *"While physical activity is important for kids, these tests do not supplement state physical education requirements in any substantive way, nor do they provide data used to improve physical education practices."*

The LAO Report criteria in selecting the mandates recommended for elimination are described as follows: *"In making our assessment of each education mandate, we use a somewhat narrow definition of 'statewide interest' – focusing primarily on activities related to accountability as well as public health and safety. Over time, the education system has gradually shifted to a focus on outcomes and accountability. An outcomes-based system cannot function, however, without data and procedures to assess effectiveness and hold schools accountable. Furthermore, the education system cannot meet its accountability goals if students and teachers are not protected from health and safety risks. In short, we believe education activities should only be a mandate if they are needed to hold schools accountable or protect students and educators."*

## SOLUTION:

The California Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (CAPHERD) and many other health-related organizations and agencies recommend that the mandate for the Physical Performance Tests **NOT** be suspended, nor eliminated, for the following reasons:

- **The Physical Fitness Test (PFT), established in 1990, is the only ongoing objective comprehensive source of student health-related fitness data collected statewide.**
- **The PFT is the only statewide common assessment and source of ongoing student-generated objective data that provides statewide accountability for school physical education programs.**
- The PFT used by California is a national assessment tool endorsed by the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, and the Society of State Directors for Health, Physical Education and Recreation. California was a pioneer in utilizing this research-based assessment tool, and California provides a statewide physical fitness testing and reporting model that an increasing number of states in the nation now follow (e.g., Texas). These efforts now place California in an excellent position in terms of addressing current trends in national accountability assurances attached to Race To The Top funds.
- **During this period of the national focus on childhood obesity, the PFT annual report is a critical source of information for the residents of California about the health and fitness of our children.**
- At a cost of \$ 1.68 per student, the PFT is one of the most cost effective accountability programs across all subject areas. (The LAO estimated cost for the Physical Performance Tests mandate is \$2,325,000. In 2009, the PFT annual report provided physical fitness data from 1,380,955 students in grades 5, 7 and 9.)
- **Data generated from the PFT is the ONLY objective source available, on a local, regional and statewide basis, to inform and educate students, teachers, parents, community, regional, State and national health agencies and organizations about the health-related fitness of California students in the areas of aerobic capacity, body mass composition (BMI), muscular strength, endurance and flexibility.**

- **Data generated from the PFT is critical to key stakeholders for research and grant purposes to enhance educational programs for children and youth. Since October 2007, researchers from the following agencies have requested PFT data from the CDE:**

California Center for Public Health Advocacy  
 CA Dept. of Public Health  
 CRESST, UCLA  
 CSU Los Angeles  
 CSU San Bernardino, Kinesiology  
 Harvard; National Bureau of Economic Research  
 LA County Dept. of Public Health  
 La Sierra College, Dept of Health and Exercise Science  
 Marin County Health and Human Services, Epidemiology Program  
 Orange County Health Care Agency  
 Stanford University, Economics Dept.  
 San Francisco State University, Department of Health Education, College of Health and Human Services  
 San Francisco State University, Health Education  
 U.C. Davis Division of Cardiovascular Medicine  
 UC Berkeley  
 UC Berkeley Center for Weight & Health  
 UC Davis  
 UCB School of Public Health  
 UCD & Indian Health Services  
 UCLA Dept. of Sociology  
 UCSF Pediatrics  
 Ventura County Public Health

- Data contained in the annual PFT report is critical to key stakeholders from education agencies, as well as public health agencies, in order to demonstrate student health needs in competitive applications for federal, regional and private funds to benefit California students. It is one of the best objective and most comprehensive data sources on childhood obesity in the nation.
- **In 2009 alone, a minimum of \$35,000,000 in federal and private grant funding was generated for use in California schools and communities based on the use of PFT data collected at schools and reported through the California Department of Education. These fund awards included the national Physical Education Program (PEP), Healthy Eating, Active Community (HEAC) and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grants.**

- **In 2009, for every dollar (\$1) invested in the Physical Performance Tests Mandates (\$2,325,000), California Local Education Agencies (LEAs) received a minimum of 15 dollars (\$15) from federal and private sources to improve health and fitness programs to benefit students (\$35,000,000).**
- In addition, in 2009, many LEAs effectively used local and state data from the PFT Annual Report in applications to access numerous large and small grants from local businesses, health agencies and foundations to benefit the health and fitness of students.
- Based on historical evidence, prior to 1990, without the accountability of the annual PFT statewide reporting process, many LEAs neglected to assess student fitness accurately and safely, if at all. Currently, all LEAs comply with the state reporting requirements, and many LEAs assess students at grade levels other than those required by the state. LEAs use the results to inform students, parents and guardians, teachers, and community members.
- **LEAs use the PFT data to modify and improve programs for students. The PFT professional development provided statewide assists administrators and teachers in using the PFT data to analyze student needs and program needs in order to modify programs and enhance curriculum and instruction for students.**
- The accountability of statewide PFT reporting generates awareness and attention (including that of the media) for physical education programs. This social marketing highlights quality programs and best practices, resulting in enhanced programs for students.
- The PFT has been a key factor in promoting technology in physical education programs, including such research-based tools as pedometers, heart monitors, accelerometers, digital BMI assessment equipment, and quality computerized instruction to enhance student learning.
- The PFT statewide accountability and professional development have helped to ensure that physical performance tests are administered in an accurate and safe manner, using best practices for students.
- **Each year since the PFT results have been reported statewide, student scores have continued to improve.**
- **Healthy and fit children and youth cut medical costs to the state. Healthy and fit children and youth improve school attendance and funding to schools. Healthy and fit children and youth improve student achievement and school performance.**

- Without a state mandate for physical performance tests, there would be no accountability for the health-related fitness status of California students at the local, county or state level.
- The Physical Performance Tests mandate IS needed to provide program and school accountability and protect the health and safety of students.

During times of financial stress, decisions to eliminate or suspend funds should be weighed carefully in terms of cost effectiveness. Eliminating or suspending the mandate and funding for the California Physical Performance Test may at first seem penny wise, but is clearly pound (\$/lb) foolish in terms of the documented health and economic and accountability benefits for our California students and schools. In the very words of the report from the LAO: “ *In short, we believe education activities should only be a mandate if they are needed to hold schools accountable or protect students and educators.*” The California Physical Performance Tests do hold schools accountable and protect the health of students. **Therefore, the solution is NOT to suspend (nor eliminate) the Physical Performance Tests Mandate!**