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“We are now realizing the negative results of cutting our Physical Education programs.”

California Physical Fitness Test Scores Indicate Less than 39% of Students in ‘Healthy Fitness Zone’[®]

On Thursday, March 24, 2011, California’s State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson released the results of California’s 2010 School Physical Fitness Test (PFT) scores. Among PFT results collected: less than 39 percent of California’s students overall passed all six PFT areas and scored within California’s established “Healthy Fitness Zone[®]” (HFZ[®]) -- or, over 61 percent of California’s students could not perform at HFZ levels. The PFT results also reveal that of the State’s youngest students tested -- California’s fifth graders -- less than 29 percent could meet HFZ levels of performance; or 71 percent of California’s fifth graders did not achieve HFZ scores in all six testing areas.

“California’s schools have dramatically and disproportionately cut Physical Education and activity programs in the last five years, citing severe budget cuts,” states Daniel Latham, President of the California Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (CAHPERD). “At the same time, we are seeing fewer and fewer of our kids able to achieve and maintain healthy levels of fitness. If children are not given the opportunity to move at school, or the instruction that will help them adopt healthy, active habits, we will continue to see our Healthy Fitness Zone scores drop; and a correlating increase in childhood obesity and other health challenges related to inactivity.”

Latham continued, “California’s Elementary schools in particular have implemented the greatest number of cuts to Physical Education and activity programs. And now, 71 percent of our fifth graders are unable to achieve Healthy Fitness Zone levels of performance. That is no coincidence. I think these scores clearly indicate that we are now realizing the negative results of cutting our Physical Education programs. We are cutting our programs at the expense of our kids’ health and wellness.”

The goal of California’s physical fitness test, known as the *FITNESSGRAM*[®] is to facilitate learning about physical activity and physical fitness concepts, increasing the likelihood students will adopt lifetime patterns of physical activity. In 1996, the State Board of Education designated *FITNESSGRAM*[®] as the required physical fitness test that local educational agencies

shall administer to California students in grades five, seven, and nine. The *FITNESSGRAM*[®], a health-related fitness test developed by the Dallas-based Cooper Institute, uses the Healthy Fitness Zone[®] (HFZ[®]) to evaluate fitness performance.

The *FITNESSGRAM*[®] assesses six fitness areas: aerobic capacity, body composition, abdominal strength, trunk extensor strength, upper body strength, and flexibility. The *FITNESSGRAM*[®] test is a criterion-referenced assessment where students receive scores in the “Healthy Fitness Zone[®]” (HFZ[®]) or “Needs Improvement.” A score in the HFZ[®] indicates the student’s level of fitness is sufficient for good health.

According to the California Department of Education (CDE), in 2009–2010, the PFT was given to approximately 1.32 million California students in grades five, seven, and nine. Approximately 91 percent of the students enrolled in those grades were administered at least one of the six *FITNESSGRAM*[®] tests. Of those, less than 29 percent of the grade five students scored in the HFZ[®] in all six fitness areas. Almost 35 percent of the students in grade seven scored in HFZ[®] in all six fitness areas; and less than 39 percent of grade nine students met the HFZ[®] standards in all six fitness areas. Please check the CDE website for all PFT results, information and tables: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/pf/pftresults.asp>.

“The 2010 *FITNESSGRAM*[®] data for students in fifth grade should raise our awareness and concern,” comments Joanie Verderber, President-Elect of CAHPERD, and the Project Director of School Health and Physical Education Programs for the Los Angeles County Office of Education. “For five of the six *FITNESSGRAM*[®] subtests, there was either a decrease or no gain in the percentage of students that attained the HFZ[®]. In the last few years, many districts transferred funding meant for physical education equipment and supplies, professional development, and elementary physical education teachers, to the General Fund to offset budget shortfalls. With less supplies, equipment and fewer teachers, test results indicate that the quality of elementary physical education appears to have diminished. Our elementary schools need to find ways to improve the quality of physical education and fitness levels of our children.”

CAHPERD President Latham concluded, “These PFT scores reflect that we are going backwards, not forward, in our efforts to keep our children healthy. California’s parents should demand that their children receive quality education that will positively impact the whole child -- mind and body. These test scores clearly indicate that more of our educational resources should be dedicated to ensuring 100 percent of our children achieve HFZ levels. Until that happens, we will continue to see these scores drop; and will potentially raise an entire generation of very unhealthy people.”

For further information regarding California’s PFT scores, or how community members and parents can better support California’s physical and health education programs, please check the CAHPERD website: www.cahperd.org.

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