

CALIFORNIA**State's schools found skimping on PE classes****Less than 20 minutes a day at majority of districts reviewed**

Nanette Asimov, Chronicle Staff Writer
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More than half of school districts reviewed by the state are giving kids less physical education than the law requires -- at least 20 minutes a day -- according to public documents obtained by the nonprofit California Center for Public Health Advocacy.

"This is a tragedy for California education," said Harold Goldstein, executive director of the group, which found that 37 of the 73 school districts checked by the state Education Department over the last two years had failed to make students sweat to the extent required.

"These results are appalling," Goldstein said. He added that children are increasingly diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes -- once associated with adults -- because of their sedentary, snack-gobbling habits.

Goldstein and his team of health experts are the same people who got junk food banned from public school premises, beginning in July 2007.

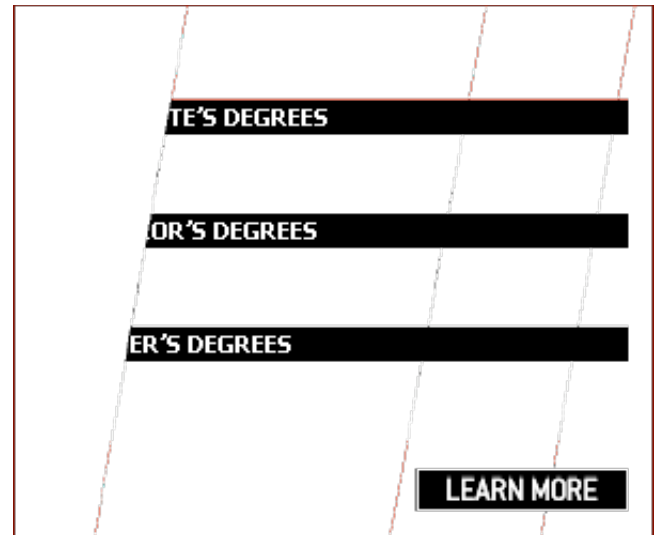
Now they are taking aim at the state for what they call "dropping the ball" on student exercise. They say that by failing to require the latest generation of young spuds to get up off the couch, the public schools are making the much-publicized childhood obesity epidemic even worse.

So Goldstein's group filed a Public Records Act request to see results of the state Education Department's review of 73 school districts over the last two years.

The state reviews a random sampling of districts each year to determine if they are complying with the law that requires children in grades 1 to 6 to complete 200 minutes of physical education every 10 days -- essentially 20 minutes per day -- and older students (grades 7 to 12) to complete 400 minutes every 10 days.

The group found that there is no penalty for lack of compliance, and that eight of the 10 Bay Area school districts reviewed by the state failed to comply.

They were San Francisco Unified; Berkeley and Oakland Unified in Alameda County; Pittsburg and West Contra Costa Unified in Contra Costa County; and Gilroy and Morgan Hill Unified and Moreland



Elementary in Santa Clara County.

It is telling, for example, that in the San Francisco school district directory, there is no listing for a physical education department.

"The district is in the process of designing a master plan for physical education to assure that all students receive the appropriate instruction in PE and for the required number of minutes," said Sandra Lam, San Francisco's "teaching and learning" director.

She acknowledged that teachers have not been providing appropriate type or amount of physical education instruction under state guidelines. But she said that doesn't mean students aren't exercising.

"Elimination games such as kick ball, dodgeball, four square, and tetherball are popular PE activities in elementary schools, but these are not considered appropriate PE activities under the state guidelines," Lam said, adding that under voter-approved Proposition H, San Francisco schools will soon be receiving an infusion of city money specifically to beef up physical education.

The two Bay Area districts that did provide students with the required amount of exercise were Palo Alto Unified in Santa Clara County and Oak Grove Elementary in Sonoma County.

Most violations were found in Southern California counties, where seven of 16 districts failed. In San Bernardino County, six of the 15 districts failed.

Jack O'Connell, the newly re-elected state schools chief, took his victory laps Wednesday in San Diego -- another district that fails to give students enough exercise.

O'Connell called the districts' noncompliance "a concern," but said state standards for physical fitness were high. He said school administrators often complain to him about having to satisfy PE standards while feeling so much pressure from the federal No Child Left Behind Education Act to raise test scores.

"They say, 'We don't have time.' But that's the wrong answer," O'Connell said. "The two are not mutually exclusive. If you have students who come to the school in good physical shape, they'll do better academically."

When asked what needs to be done to get the districts to comply with the law, however, O'Connell said he wasn't sure.

State Sen. Tom Torlakson, an Antioch Democrat and former high school athletics coach, said he knows what needs to be done: Give the schools money to train teachers in new physical education methods and to improve their programs.

Torlakson supports efforts in the Legislature to earmark \$85 million annually for physical education

programs -- money that opponents would rather have the flexibility to spend in other educational areas. And he is trying to get a bill through the Legislature that would, among other things, expand state monitoring of physical education compliance and require the state to post results on its Web site.

The bill will be heard in the Assembly Education Committee meeting at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday in Sacramento.

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