



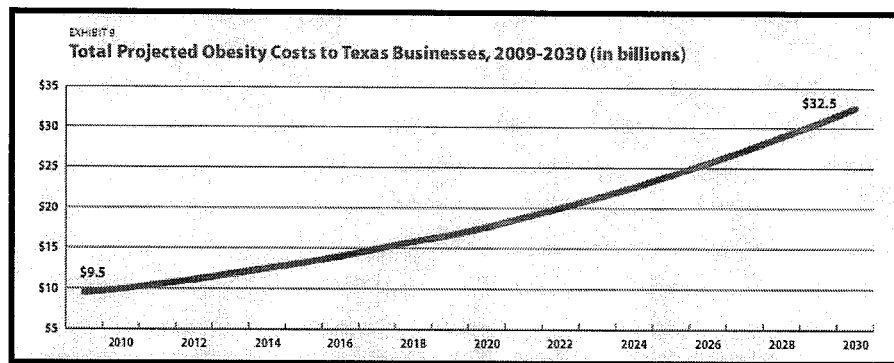
Senate Public Education Committee Hearing

March 31st, 2011

SB 226

Good morning Members, I am Lauren Dimitry, Health Policy Coordinator at Texans Care for Children. At Texans Care for Children, we look to our broad base of community-based experts—our partners and 147 members throughout the state who together represent hundreds of thousands of Texas children—to inform our work and help us in developing our legislative agenda.

Currently, 42% of Texas fourth-graders are overweight,<sup>i</sup> while over 20 % of Texas school-children are already obese.<sup>ii</sup> According to the Texas Comptroller's newest report, obesity cost Texas businesses \$9.5 billion dollars in 2009, and that cost is expected to rise to over \$30 billion dollars by 2030.<sup>iii</sup> Obesity can result in type II diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and cancer among other health complications, as well as other negative social outcomes.<sup>iv</sup> The costs related to obesity in Texas—financial, social, and medical are unsustainable.



Source: Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts

Fitnessgram is the annual, confidential fitness assessment and reporting system for students in Texas, and it currently provides two major benefits for fighting the obesity epidemic. First, FitnessGram provides a fitness report card for students and their families, as a tool to gauge fitness levels, which provides parents with an evaluation of their child's health. The FitnessGram assessments establish whether or not students are in a "healthy fitness zone" for their age and gender. Without Fitnessgram, many parents would have no meaningful measure of their child's physical health. We all expect parents to take responsibility for their child's health, and the FitnessGram assessment is a valuable informing tool that parents have to make important health decisions.

Secondly, the FitnessGram can provide schools, districts, physicians, urban planners, park developers and policymakers with needed data about the child obesity epidemic in Texas. This, in turn, gives the legislature, as well as private foundations, the capacity to develop smart, targeted interventions where we can achieve the greatest results.

There are multiple national studies<sup>v</sup> that demonstrate the link between academic achievement and fitness status, but at this time Texas does not have the state-wide ability to evaluate the FitnessGram data in this way. SB 226 would resolve this by requiring school districts to report individual student FitnessGram results, de-identified to protect students' privacy, to the Texas Education Agency and allow fitness data to be correlated to academic data. In a limited 2009 sample study of Texas students' FitnessGram results, researchers found that students who were physically fit were more

likely to do well on the state's standardized tests and have higher school attendance.<sup>vi</sup> SB 226 would adjust the FitnessGram reporting process, and allow for important analysis of the connection between fitness, standardized tests, and attendance.

As we persist in the fight against obesity, FitnessGram results continue to be an invaluable tool to inform the decisions of parents, schools, researchers, and policymakers. Obesity is just one problem where coming together to put our children on a path to success is the right choice—not only to improve young lives but also to ensure our own solvency as a state. Fit students represent a more vibrant future workforce, healthier families, and ultimately a more prosperous Texas.

Thank you for your time and commitment. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or the staff of Texans Care for Children at 512.473.2274.

Respectfully,

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<sup>i</sup> Hoelscher D.M., Perez A., Lee E.S., Sanders J., Kelder S.H., Day R.S., Ward J. School Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) III Survey, 2004-2005. UT School of Public Health, Houston.

<sup>ii</sup> Texas Comptroller Susan Combs. "Gaining Costs, Losing Time: The Obesity Crisis in Texas." February, 2011.

<sup>iii</sup> Texas Comptroller Susan Combs. "Gaining Costs, Losing Time: The Obesity Crisis in Texas." February, 2011.

<sup>iv</sup> Centers for Disease Control. "Overweight and Obesity: Health Consequences." <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/causes/health.html>. March, 2011.

<sup>v</sup> Active Living Research. "Active Education: Physical Education, Physical Activity and Academic Performance." [http://www.activelivingresearch.org/files/Active\\_Ed.pdf](http://www.activelivingresearch.org/files/Active_Ed.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> TEA New Release. "Physically fit students more likely to do well in school, less likely to be disciplinary problems." March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009. <http://www.fitnessgram.net/news/fitnessresults09.pdf>.