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medicine pioneer**

Senate Bill 530 is a victory for children across Texas. It signals the state’s commitment to improving the health of our children by increasing physical activity and adding annual testing of students’ physical fitness levels. These efforts will help jumpstart a decrease in the alarming trend of obesity and improve academic achievement among students statewide.

We know that obesity is a major predictor of the growing diabetes crisis. According to last week’s Journal of the American Medical Association, Type II diabetes in children has increased from 4 percent in 1990 to 45 percent in 2000. In fact, it has been predicted that for every child born after the year 2000, one out of three Caucasians, one out of two Hispanics, and two out of five African Americans will become diabetic (JAMA, 2003).

The epidemic of overweight and obese children is a critical issue that needs urgent attention and action. Thanks to SB 530’s enhanced physical activity initiatives for K-8th grade and the mandatory testing of physical fitness among 3rd-12th graders, we are taking steps in the right direction.

Texas ranks 10th among all states for obesity and overweight populations (CDC, 2005). In Texas, nearly two-thirds of the state’s adults are overweight or obese, while 42 percent of the state’s 4th graders, 39 percent of 8th graders and 36 percent of 11th graders were overweight or at risk of being overweight (Counting Costs and Calories, 2007). This is unacceptable.

To help turn this terrible trend around, I am dedicating my time and resources to improve the health and fitness of children in my home state. The Cooper Institute will submit a proposal to the Texas Education Agency’s Request For Offer (RFO) to consider FITNESSGRAM® as the statewide physical fitness assessment tool.

Since 1982, FITNESSGRAM has been used in more than 65,000 schools nationwide with 1,000 of those schools using the program right here in Texas. The program tests students on aerobic capacity, body composition, muscular strength, endurance and flexibility. Data shows that students who were able to achieve a “healthy fitness zone” in at least 5 out of 6 tests scored higher academically and had fewer discipline problems in school.

We must work together—parents, teachers, legislators and doctors—to change the course of our children’s future from one of illness and limitations to a life full of health and happiness.

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Founded in 1970, The Cooper Institute is a 501(c)3 nonprofit dedicated to health and fitness research and education. The Cooper Institute is one of ten divisions located on the 30-acre Cooper Aerobics Center campus in Dallas.