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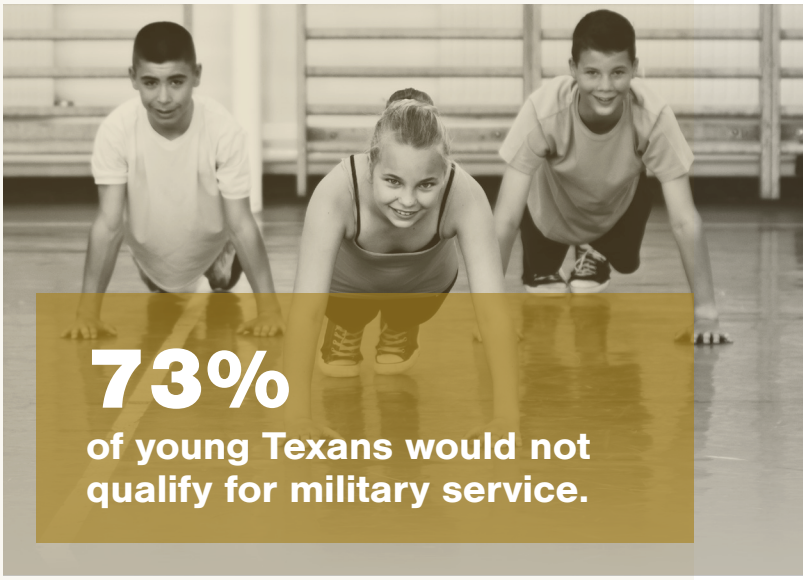
FACTSHEET

A Roadmap For Increasing Physical Activity in Texas Schools

Physical education, classroom activity breaks, and recess can reduce obesity and improve military eligibility

Department of Defense data shows that nearly one-third of young Americans are now too overweight to serve their country—one of the leading reasons why 71 percent of young adults nationwide and 73 percent of young adults in Texas would not be able to qualify for military service if they tried to join.[1]

Healthy habits start in childhood, and schools can play an important role in providing opportunities for physical activity. By adolescence, 37 percent of Texas youth are already overweight or obese.[2] Yet both physical education (PE) and recess have declined in schools over the past decade, and more than two-thirds of Texas children get less than 20 minutes of vigorous exercise daily.[3]



Three strategies to increase physical activity in Texas schools

1 High-quality physical education (PE)

PE programs that utilize a strong curriculum, good equipment, and fitness assessments can boost children's daily physical activity and improve their fitness and academic performance.[4]

For example, one rigorous study showed that adolescents who participated in a high-quality, daily physical education program reduced their odds of becoming an overweight adult by 28 percent.[5]

2 In-class physical activity breaks

Short periods of in-class physical activity improve children's attention and performance.[6] One rigorous study found that combining physical activity with math and language lessons boosted children's test scores by the equivalent of four months in learning gains.[7]

3 Structured recess

If structured properly, children can accumulate another 20 minutes of physical activity during recess.[8] Research shows that having well-trained recess supervisors, utilizing low-cost equipment, and using painted markings for games like hopscotch can increase the time kids spend active during recess by 27 to 32 percent.[9]

Policy recommendation

Texas policymakers should improve the quality of physical education (PE) programs by requiring school districts to complete self-assessments of their PE programs, including the following quality measures:

- Amount of PE offered
- Curriculum standards
- Teacher credentials and professional development
- Student assessment
- Equipment and facilities
- Policies for withholding or allowing substitutions for PE

Increasing the quality and quantity of physical activity in Texas schools are critical steps towards addressing the childhood obesity crisis and helping young adults qualify for military service should they choose to serve.

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