

Parents are best able to trim down their kids

By Bill Shaw

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“Results of a new state physical fitness test confirmed that Texas children, especially teenagers, are seriously out of shape,” wrote Gary Scharrer and Jennifer Radcliffe in the July 2 Houston Chronicle.

Almost 2.6 million students participated in the first comprehensive physical fitness test in Texas.

The test consisted of a 1-mile run, trunk lifts, push-ups, a shoulder stretch, curlups and a skin-fold test to measure body-mass index (BMI).

Texas Education Agency statistics show a steady decline in physical fitness from third-graders to 12th-graders. Only 28 percent of the third-grade boys and 32 percent of the girls passed. Nine percent of the 12th-grade boys and 8 percent of girls passed.

Also on July 2, Pat Hernandez of KUH-FM Houston Public Radio News, interviewed Dr. Kenneth Cooper, founder of the Dallas-based Cooper Institute, about the FITNESSGRAM, which has been administered to children all over the world since 1982.

The FITNESSGRAM “essentially tests for fitness, fatness, flexibility, strength,” Cooper said. “We call it reaching a fitness zone;

all you have to do is rank in the top 80th percentile. And we have found that in testing children from the third grade up to the 12th grade, there was an alarming decrease in the number of children that could pass this test, or reach the fitness zone, and one of the worst responses was in the senior students.”



“Experts will use the data to establish links between health, academic performance, attendance and behavior,” Hernandez said. “In fact, a national report last year found Texas ranked sixth among states

with the highest obesity rates for children 10-17.”

Previous testing and data indicate a definite correlation between physical fitness and academic performance.

“That relationship is undeniable because we’ve been testing children in California with this program since 1999, and we found perfect correlations between the number of tests they passed in the FITNESSGRAM tests and the grades they made in school in math, reading and English language,” Cooper said.

With the recent revelation that Brazosport ISD students had some difficulties with TAKS, perhaps the problems are not all mental.

“With your obesity problems, if you try to eliminate P.E., as we did with ‘No Child Left Behind,’ and replace it with math and En-

glish and science and reading, it didn’t improve the grades,” Cooper said. “Look what happened to TAKS. If we want to improve the academic grades in this state, the best way to do that is to improve their fitness and we can do it.”

How did our area students do on the FITNESSGRAM?

“We kept our results under the direction of the individual campuses,” said Jesse Crow, director of athletics and physical education of Brazosport ISD. “The software is new, and we don’t have the capacity to assimilate all the data.”

I agree with keeping the data close to home and each campus working on the students’ needs. On-campus administrators and teachers should be aware of and in charge of the students’ physical fitness needs.

Kalean Bowie, director of student services of the Angleton ISD, was not available for comments when I called last week because of the holiday. I received only an automated voice operator at the Columbia-Brazoria ISD, also because of the holiday weekend. Greg Anderson, curriculum director of Danbury ISD, said essentially the same thing as Crow: Each campus tested individually.

As a retired educator, I lay blame not on the school districts, but the parents for the appalling physical state of Texas’ youngsters. It’s time for the parents to get off their duffs, develop physical fitness regimens and provide positive models for their unfit and obese children.

Bill Shaw’s running column appears in The Facts every other Monday.