



Childhood Obesity

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Ohio Lawmakers Consider Putting Schools in Charge of Fight Against Childhood Obesity

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Ohio lawmakers are debating a measure that would place schools at the forefront of the fight against childhood obesity, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* reports. Introduced simultaneously in the Ohio House and Senate, the Healthy Choices for Healthy Children bill aims to address childhood obesity by improving students' access to nutritious foods, making physical activity mandatory and periodically tracking students' weight. Specifically, the bill—which is endorsed by a coalition of health care organizations, food industry associations and hospitals—calls for schools to provide 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day, not including recess; increases the physical education (P.E.) requirement for high school students from a half-unit to a full unit starting in fall 2010; requires school districts to provide P.E. report cards; and requires P.E. teachers to be certified or licensed by 2014. In addition, the law would allow schools to provide a free breakfast to all students who qualify for a free or reduced-price breakfast and require that foods and beverages offered on a la carte menus and in vending machines meet federal nutrition guidelines as closely as possible. Finally, the measure would require schools to measure students' body mass index (BMI) when they enter school and again in third, fifth and ninth grades; calls for schools to educate parents about their children's BMI and associated health risks; and asks schools to post data on students' BMI where applicable. According to Sen. Eric Kearney (D-North Avondale), who co-sponsored the bill, children spend approximately seven hours per day at school, making it a prime target for obesity prevention initiatives. The *Enquirer* notes that a July report ranked Ohio 15th nationally for the number of overweight or obese children between age 10 and age 17, with approximately one-third of the state's children considered overweight or obese (O'Farrell, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 11/19/09).

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