



November 6, 2009

Dr. Meria Carstarphen
Austin ISD
1111 W. 6th St.
Austin, TX 78703

Dear Dr. Carstarphen:

After review of possible changes and the potential implications, the AISD School Health Advisory Council unanimously recommends that AISD continue to require .5 credit of health and 1.5 credits of PE during the 2010-2011 school year.

While trying to provide more flexibility in course requirements last session, the state legislature changed the mandates for health and PE for the recommended degree plan; reducing PE by .5 credit and abolishing the .5 credit health requirement. The requirements remain at 1.5 credits of PE and .5 credit of health on the distinguished and minimum plans at this time. The State Board of Education will be voting in November on a rule to bring the recommended plan into compliance with this legislation, but will not take action on the distinguished or minimum plans until sometime next year. Each District has the option of keeping health and PE at the current levels and we applaud AISD for maintaining the requirement for 2009-10.

AISD has been a leader in promoting "Fit, Healthy and Ready to Learn" students. Our SHAC has worked side by side with school administration to research and recommend the best options for our schools, keeping in mind fiscal impacts at the same time we are promoting healthy learning environments. We would like our District to continue to lead in this area!

Here are the facts.

- **PE and Health have an impact on student test scores.** Recent AISD Fitnessgram data shows that our fit kids are scoring better on their TAKS tests than those who are not within the healthy range. Students in low performing schools are scoring lower on Fitnessgram. Students on the minimum degree plan are in the most need of health and PE to help them be healthy and enhance their performance on tests. We need more PE, not less.

- **Healthy kids stay in school. Sick kids cost the District money.** PE and health can give our students information they need to stay healthy. AISD has 83,000 students. The national average cost for absent students is \$9-20 per day. Obese children miss an average of 1 day of school per month. That equals nine days per year.

AISD has 83,000 students and 30% of those students are overweight or obese. At the low end of the cost (\$9 p/day) that would be over 2 million dollars per school year in lost revenue. If health and PE classes could help us reduce that cost by half, you would save the district 1 million dollars!

• **The SBOE has not determined it will make all three degree plans the same and make reductions in the distinguished and minimum plans.** If the SBOE does nothing, the Distinguished and Minimum plans will still require Health and PE at current levels. This could result in graduation issues and switching of plans. School principals have expressed concerns over students in distinguished plans dropping to a recommended plan to gain more weighted classes. Another concern is students in the recommended plan who are not passing could be placed in the minimum plan and if the requirements were not the same, they would then be faced with additional PE/Health credits to graduate.

Solution: Keep the PE/Health requirements in all three degree plans.

The legislature can put PE and Health back in next session, and there is already movement to make that happen. If they do, and AISD changes next year, they will have to rehire and revise schedules again the following year.

• **Texas will be one of only 8 states that do not require health education. We do not think the legislature intended this consequence.** We are facing an epidemic of childhood obesity, asthma incidents are increasing, diabetes is a serious concern and teen pregnancy is on the rise. If we do not have health education in schools, our children could be learning from less educated, inaccurate sources. Most of the major health issues facing our children are related to behavior – STDs, cancer, heart disease, even diabetes can be impacted by making healthier choices. For our kids to grow up and be productive citizens, they must have accurate, well-founded information on a variety of health topics. We need health classes in high school to ensure all students get good information about making healthy choices and living healthy lives.

When a school system that has been recognized for its support of educating the whole child, is now contemplating stepping backward and not supporting our children's health as a priority, it is truly disheartening. And to endorse the position of our state, as we become one of only 8 states that do not require health education for high school graduation, is unconscionable. We have mandatory coordinated school health and PE minutes in elementary and middle schools. These children are growing up with a better understanding of the importance of good nutrition and being physically active. We need to continue to support that philosophy through their high school years to ensure they have the best chance of becoming healthy, productive citizens. Let's move forward, not back.

We respectfully request continuing the existing requirements of 1.5 credits PE and .5 credit of Health for 2020-2011 school year and beyond.

Respectfully,

Shannon Carr
Chair, AISD SHAC
scarr@austinmhc.org / 512.636-2270