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BILL ANALYSIS

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Senate Bill 282 (Substitute S-1 as reported)
Sponsor: Senator Buzz Thomas
Committee: Health Policy

Date Completed: 6-27-07

RATIONALE

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the prevalence of overweight and obesity has increased dramatically nationwide since the mid-1970s. Among children aged six to 11 years, prevalence increased from 6.5% to 18.8%, and among children aged 12 to 19, prevalence increased from 5.0% to 17.4%. Being overweight or obese is associated with an increased risk for various health conditions such as hypertension, type II diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers.

A primary factor contributing to overweight and obesity is a sedentary lifestyle. Children spend less time outside of school engaging in physical activity, and the amount of physical education they receive in school has declined over the years for various reasons. In Michigan, while the Revised School Code requires public schools to provide physical education, it does not specify how much. Additionally, the Code permits schools to substitute a student's extracurricular physical activity for the required physical education. It has been suggested that a minimum physical education requirement be established for kindergarten through fifth grade, and that the substitution provision be eliminated for all grades.

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Revised School Code to do the following:

- Eliminate a provision that allows a school district to credit a pupil's participation in extracurricular athletics or other extracurricular activities involving physical activity as meeting the Code's

physical education requirement for the pupil.

- Require the governing board of a public school, as part of providing the required physical education, to ensure that the school provided for all pupils at least 30 minutes of physical education at least two days per week for the entire school year, for each of grades K through five.

The Code requires each public school in the State to provide health and physical education, and requires each pupil attending public school in Michigan who is physically fit and capable of doing so to take the course. The bill would delete the reference to "physically fit".

MCL 381.1502

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

The number of obese children in Michigan reportedly has tripled since the 1970s, leading to various health problems previously seen only in adults and contributing to the increasing cost of health care in the State. Overweight children are reported to have a 70% chance of being overweight as adults, and an 80% chance if they have an overweight parent. Michigan is said to have higher health care costs than other states, and chronic disease that could be prevented with better lifestyle choices is a primary reason.

A lack of physical activity is a leading cause of overweight and obesity. As children spend more time playing video games and watching television, and as the amount of physical education required by schools declines, children do not get sufficient exercise. It is critical, however, that people are taught preventative behaviors at an early age. Schools present a natural opportunity for the nurturing of a culture that emphasizes the importance of physical activity and a healthy lifestyle. Physical education classes in schools are a vital component of a comprehensive health program, and can help pupils develop the attitudes and skills necessary to maintain a healthy lifestyle outside school hours and into adulthood. In addition to a decline in health care costs, increased physical fitness among children reportedly is associated with better academic performance.

Currently, a student's participation in extracurricular physical activities such as sports, marching band, or ROTC may be counted toward fulfillment of the physical education requirement. While all physical activity is beneficial, these activities do not have the same goals or provide the same content as a comprehensive physical education program. For this reason, the substitution provision should be eliminated for all students, and a minimum amount of physical education should be established for elementary pupils.

According to the Michigan Department of Education, most school districts already provide the minimum amount that the bill would require for grades K through five, so the bill should not present an undue compliance burden.

Response: Some are concerned about the potential cost to schools that do not currently provide the floor proposed by the bill, as well as the possibility that less time could be devoted to academics and preparation for standardized testing.

Legislative Analyst: Julie Cassidy

FISCAL IMPACT

State: The bill would have no fiscal impact on the State.

Local: By removing a pupil's participation in extracurricular athletics or other extracurricular physical activity as a means

to meet the physical education requirement in the Code, the bill could require school districts to offer more physical education classes. Offering more classes could require additional physical education teachers, if other teachers and courses could not be switched to physical education, leading to higher costs.

Similarly, if schools were required to provide at least 30 minutes of physical education at least twice per week for pupils in grades K-5, if a school is not currently providing at least this amount, then the school could see costs from providing these additional courses. A cost estimate is not practicable, however, since it is unknown how schools would be able to absorb these requirements within their current practices, work forces, and course offerings.

Fiscal Analyst: Kathryn Summers-Coty

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