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## *Dropping the Ball...*

### **California Schools Fail to Meet Physical Education Mandates**

**Sacramento, CA, June 8, 2006...** Based on information collected through a Public Records Act request, more than half of California school districts assessed by the California Department of Education (CDE) failed to meet the mandated elementary school physical education (P.E.) requirement of 200 minutes every ten days. Despite unprecedented levels of childhood overweight, the CDE records reveal a consistent lack of compliance throughout the state, regardless of the school district's economics or location.

"Our priorities are tragically skewed," cautions Dr. Harold Goldstein, executive director of the California Center for Public Health Advocacy (CCPHA), which requested and compiled the CDE results. "We're in the midst of a severe and growing childhood obesity epidemic and yet most of our children are missing out on even the most basic school physical activity opportunities."

According to CDE records collected for the last two school years, 51 percent of reviewed school districts with elementary students failed to meet minimum P.E. standards as prescribed by state law. To verify compliance, on-site reviews were conducted by the CDE for each of the 73 districts for which the CCPHA was able to obtain data (representing 28 percent of all California students).

"State testing standards and the national No Child Left Behind Legislation combine to make those 200 minutes a tempting treasure trove of time to dip into," explains Dr. Antronette Yancey of the UCLA School of Public Health. "Even when mandated P.E. time isn't diverted to

more traditional academic courses, there are relatively few educators trained to provide an engaging P.E. experience.”

Yancey points out, however, that there is increasing evidence that regular participation in high-quality P.E. can assist in improving standardized test scores. Studies have not only linked physical activity with improved self-esteem and lower rates of depression and anxiety, but a recent CDE study noted a strong positive relationship between physical fitness and academic achievement.

“It’s a sad fact that P.E. is education’s ugly stepchild,” said Goldstein. “P.E. doesn’t just help address our obesity crisis. When properly taught, physical education plays a vital role in positively affecting both the academic and behavioral performance of children, while building life-long health habits.”

The inability to meet the state’s P.E. mandate isn’t just the fault of public schools, asserts the CCPHA. Parents and elected officials, the Center insists, must also make physical education a top priority if we are going to protect the health of our children and their ability to perform well academically.

“There has never been a better opportunity to revolutionize P.E. for our California students,” insists Goldstein. “The need is painfully obvious. The leadership from the Governor has been strong, and there are proven tools, laws and curriculum already in place. Now is the time to kick start this P.E. revolution by funding ongoing training to ensure that teachers can deliver effective and appealing learning experiences.”

CCPHA is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization founded by the California Public Health Association-North and the Southern California Public Health Association. A full listing of all school districts assessed and background information on California’s Physical Education mandate is available on the CCPHA Web site at:  
<http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org>.