



**Texas House Public Education Committee  
Hearing on Interim Charges  
Submitted on behalf of the Partnership for a Healthy Texas  
July 25, 2022**

Chair Dutton, Vice-Chair Lozano, and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Partnership for a Healthy Texas, a coalition of organizations working to promote policies that prevent and reduce obesity in Texas, thank you for the opportunity to submit written comments on the effects of COVID-19 on learning loss and chronic absenteeism.

The COVID-19 pandemic and transitions to virtual learning options impacted all aspects of students' lives. In addition to effecting academic outcomes, the transition impacted access to healthy school meals and physical activity for students. **As schools seek to help remedy the losses that accrued during the pandemic, it is imperative that all the deficits created are addressed to ensure students have health and productive futures.**

With the closure of most schools in the Spring of 2020 and the implementation of hybrid school models, children lost access to the routine of school days. The lack of structure led to behavior changes that are often seen during summers, including increased sedentary time, decreased physical activity, and increased non-academic screen time.<sup>1</sup> These changes are particularly concerning because even prior to the pandemic 78.4 percent of Texas youth were already falling short of the recommended guideline of 60 minutes of physical activity at least 5 days per week.<sup>2</sup> A national cohort study found that as little as 10 percent of adolescence were meeting these guidelines during the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> Decreased physical activity paired with increased dietary intake seen during stay at home orders, put children at risk for increased BMI and obesity; an issue already prevalent in Texas where 17.3 percent of youth ages 10-17 live experience obesity.<sup>4</sup>

**Ensuring that physical activity is not sacrificed for instruction time is vital to addressing deficits in healthiness *and* for promoting student's academic success.** There is substantial evidence that increasing or maintaining time dedicated to physical education does not adversely impact and actually may *improve* academic performance and standardized test schools.<sup>5</sup> Dedicated time for physical activity can impact cognitive skills and attitudes and academic behavior, including enhanced concentration and improved classroom behavior.

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<sup>1</sup> Burkart S, Parker H, Weaver RG, Beets MW, Jones A, Adams EL, Chaput JP, Armstrong B. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on elementary schoolers' physical activity, sleep, screen time and diet: A quasi-experimental interrupted time series study. *Pediatr Obes.* 2022 Jan;17(1):e12846. doi: 10.1111/ijpo.12846. Epub 2021 Aug 18. PMID: 34409754; PMCID: PMC8420216

<sup>2</sup> School Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Project. Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living.

<sup>3</sup> Nagata JM, Cortez CA, Dooley EE, Iyer P, Ganson KT, Pettee Gabriel K. Moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity among adolescents in the USA during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Prev Med Rep.* 2022 Feb;25:101685. doi: 10.1016/j.pmedr.2021.101685. Epub 2021 Dec 27. PMID: 35004134; PMCID: PMC8719022.

<sup>4</sup> The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Trust for America's Health. (2020). *The State of Obesity in Texas*. Retrieved from <https://stateofchildhoodobesity.org/states/tx>.

<sup>5</sup> *The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, and Academic Performance*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 13 Aug. 2019, [https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health\\_and\\_academics/index.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/index.htm).

Not only will physical activity during the school day help students with better concentration and behavior, in the long-term, the habit of physical activity will keep students healthy and productive.

**Healthier children make stronger students.** Obesity in children is associated with poorer educational outcomes including lower grade point average, lower reading scores, lower math scores.<sup>6</sup> One contributor to this disparity is that, like students with other chronic diseases, children with obesity are more likely to have patterns of absenteeism.<sup>7</sup> This pattern persists throughout the lifetime; obesity contributes to absenteeism and decreased productivity throughout adulthood as well.<sup>8</sup>

In making recommendations for supporting efforts to increase academic development and combat chronic absenteeism, we urge the committee to support opportunities that support all aspects of children's wellness. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments on these important issues impacting Texas students. For any questions or follow up, please contact Joel Romo, Chair of the Partnership for a Healthy Texas Legislative Committee at [Joel.Romo@TexanaPublicAffairs.com](mailto:Joel.Romo@TexanaPublicAffairs.com).

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<sup>6</sup> Carey F R, et al. Educational Outcomes Associated with Childhood Obesity in the United States: Cross-sectional Results from the 2011–2012 National Survey of Children's Health. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*. July 27, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Schwimmer JB, Burwinkle TM, Varni JW. Health-related quality of life of severely obese children and adolescents. *JAMA*. 2003;289:1813–9.

<sup>8</sup> Combs, Susan. 2011. "Gaining Costs, Losing Time: The Obesity Crisis in Texas." [https://demographics.texas.gov/Resources/Publications/2011/2011-02\\_GainingCostsLosingTime.pdf](https://demographics.texas.gov/Resources/Publications/2011/2011-02_GainingCostsLosingTime.pdf) p 19