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Dell Foundation helps fund health assessment of Texas students

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The Michael & Susan Dell Foundation provided a grant of \$350,000 to help fund a ground-breaking physical fitness assessment of nearly 2.6 million Texas students.

The multiyear, \$2.5 million initiative paid for through privately raised funds examines fitness levels among students in grades three through 12 statewide.

In the first assessment this spring, the study found elementary school children are the most physically fit and that fitness levels decline with each passing grade -- corresponding with a decreasing emphasis on physical education in upper grades.

Schools used the Fitnessgram assessment developed by The Cooper Institute to test students. The assessment measures body composition, aerobic capacity, strength, endurance and flexibility. Texas is the first state to order a comprehensive physical assessment of its students.

During the program's first year, almost 2.6 million of the nearly 3.4 million students in grades three through 12 were tested. Preliminary results show that about 32 percent of third-grade girls and almost 28 percent of third-grade boys reached the "Healthy Fitness Zone."

By seventh grade, 21 percent of girls and 17 percent of boys met that achievement goal. By 12th grade, 8 percent of girls and 9 percent of boys met the health standards.

"I hope these results shock the state into reality and into action," says Dr. Kenneth Cooper, founder of The Cooper Institute in Dallas. "We must immunize children against obesity while in elementary school so that as they age they are more likely to stay healthy and fit."

A 2007 report from the Trust for America's Health found that Texas ranked sixth among states with the highest obesity rate for children ages 10-17. The report found that 19.1 percent of Texas children in this age group were considered overweight.

For more information on the study, go to: www.tea.state.tx.us

Courtesy of JB Goodwin

