

By: Lucio, et al.

S.B. No. 474

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

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AN ACT

relating to an interim study on nutrition and health in public schools.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS. The legislature finds that:

(a) Childhood obesity has reached epidemic levels in Texas. More than 28.6 percent of low-income children between the ages of 2 and 5 are obese. Approximately 38.7 percent of fourth-graders, 37.1 percent of eighth-graders, and 29.4 percent of eleventh-graders are overweight or obese. Child obesity rates in Texas are generally believed to be increasing even faster than the national rate, which has more than doubled over the last two decades.

(b) The incidence of childhood obesity and its serious health consequences reach across all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic classes, and children who are overweight at age 12 have a 75 percent risk of being overweight as adults.

(c) Overweight and obese children are at higher risk for serious long-term health problems, including Type II diabetes, cardiovascular disease and stroke, hypertension, high blood pressure, gallbladder disease, asthma, and certain cancers.

(d) Sixty-two percent of all deaths in Texas result from four chronic diseases--heart disease, cancer, stroke, and

1 diabetes--and health care experts agree that one of the most
2 effective ways of preventing these chronic diseases is to establish
3 in childhood habits of healthy eating and physical exercise that
4 people can maintain throughout their lives.

5 (e) The Texas State Strategic Health Partnership, under the
6 leadership of the commissioner of public health, adopted "healthy
7 eating and physical exercise" as its top public health priority for
8 this decade in its "Declaration for Health."

9 (f) Healthy eating plays an important role in learning and
10 cognitive development in children. Studies and pilot programs
11 across the nation and in Texas have demonstrated that children who
12 are well-nourished and physically fit are more likely to be
13 academically motivated and successful, as evidenced by improved
14 standardized test scores, increased attention and retention,
15 better school attendance, less tardiness, better behavior, fewer
16 disciplinary referrals, and reduced drop-out rates.

17 (g) The school environment plays a highly influential role
18 in a child's diet, as a child who eats a school breakfast and lunch
19 that meet the nutritional standards established by the United
20 States Department of Agriculture for the National School Breakfast
21 and National School Lunch Programs will receive 60 percent of the
22 child's average daily nutritional needs.

23 (h) In the 2001-2002 school year, 85 percent of Texas
24 schools and 99 percent of Texas school districts offered the
25 National School Breakfast Program, and of the 4.1 million Texas
26 students in grade levels kindergarten through 12, approximately 2.4
27 million, or 59 percent, participated in the National School Lunch

1 Program, while only one million, or 24 percent, enjoyed the
2 benefits of the National School Breakfast Program.

3 (i) While the United States Department of Agriculture
4 regulates the nutrient content of meals sold under its reimbursable
5 meal programs, similar standards do not exist for "competitive
6 foods" which are frequently sold outside of the department meal
7 programs through vending machines and other means of sale and which
8 are often very high in added sugar, sodium, and fat, and lacking
9 even minimal nutritional value.

10 (j) In 2001, the Texas Legislature recognized the serious
11 challenge to public health resulting from poor eating habits and
12 lack of exercise by enacting Senate Bill No. 19 to encourage and
13 assist in the establishment in all public schools programs of
14 nutrition education and minimal standards of physical education.

15 SECTION 2. JOINT INTERIM COMMITTEE. (a) A joint interim
16 committee is established for the purposes of this Act and is
17 composed of the following members:

- 18 (1) the commissioner of education;
- 19 (2) the commissioner of public health;
- 20 (3) the commissioner of agriculture;
- 21 (4) three members of the senate, appointed by the
22 lieutenant governor;
- 23 (5) three members of the house of representatives,
24 appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives;
- 25 (6) one physician who provides health services to
26 school-aged children, appointed by the governor;
- 27 (7) one member who has expertise in nutrition,

1 appointed by the governor;

2 (8) one member who is a parent of a school-aged child,
3 appointed by the governor; and

4 (9) one member who is a superintendent of schools or a
5 school principal, appointed by the governor.

6 (b) To the extent that funds are available, the interim
7 committee shall hold hearings throughout the state to:

8 (1) determine the nutritional content and quality of
9 foods and beverages served to public school children, including
10 food service meals, a la carte foods, and competitive foods and food
11 provided in vending machines;

12 (2) evaluate the short-term and long-term financial,
13 psychological, and physiological impact of obesity in public school
14 children;

15 (3) assess the academic, emotional, and health value
16 of a universal breakfast and lunch program by evaluating school
17 children from school districts that provide each child a free or
18 reduced-price breakfast and lunch; and

19 (4) evaluate school contracts relating to competitive
20 food products and vending machines, including the following issues
21 related to competitive food products and vending machines:

22 (A) economic and other impacts of potential
23 conflicts of interest;

24 (B) the length of contracts;

25 (C) advertising and marketing of competitive
26 food products;

27 (D) revenues realized by schools and school

1 districts from the sale of competitive food products;

2 (E) officials in charge of receiving and
3 disbursing revenue and the accounting of that revenue; and

4 (F) the extent to which competitive foods impact
5 each school district's food service program.

6 (c) The interim committee may consult with the School Health
7 Advisory Committee to carry out its duties.

8 SECTION 3. REPORT. To the extent that funds are available,
9 not later than October 1, 2004, the interim committee shall submit
10 to the governor, the lieutenant governor, and the speaker of the
11 house of representatives a report of the committee's findings and
12 recommendations under this Act.