California Department of Education

Executive Office

SBE-002 (REV. 11/2017)

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# **MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** October 14, 2021

**TO:** MEMBERS, State Board of Education

**FROM:** TONY THURMOND, State Superintendent of Public Instruction

**SUBJECT:** Update on the Physical Fitness Test

## Summary of Key Issues

California is committed to helping students in kindergarten through grade twelve learn about the importance of physical and mental health as well as the benefits of exercise according to ability. Because of this commitment, students are required to take physical education (PE) courses to graduate from high school, and individual student fitness is measured, recorded, and reported in elementary, middle, and high school.

California *Education Code (EC)* Section 60800 (<https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=60800&lawCode=EDC>) requires that local educational agencies (LEAs) administer the physical fitness test (PFT), designated by the California State Board of Education (SBE), during the month of February, March, April, or May to each student in grades five, seven, and nine. The law also requires that LEAs provide individual results to students for completed testing and report aggregate results in their annual school accountability report card and to the California Department of Education (CDE) at least every two years.

The FITNESSGRAM® is the PFT for California schools, having been designated as such by the SBE in February 1996. The FITNESSGRAM® is a physical fitness assessment developed by the Cooper Institute and published by Human Kinetics. The FITNESSGRAM® includes six fitness areas: Aerobic Compacity, Body Composition, Abdominal Strength and Endurance, Trunk Extensor and Strength and Flexibility, Upper Body Strength and Endurance, and Flexibility. The desired performance standard (developed by the Cooper Institute) for each fitness-area test is the Healthy Fitness Zone (HFZ). Students should strive to achieve a score within the HFZ for each fitness-area test.

The pivot to distance learning for the 2020–21 school year due to COVID-19-related school closures, however, disrupted PE classes throughout California. As a result, the Legislature passed and the Governor approved SB 820 (Chapter 110 of the Statutes of 2020), Section 68 (<https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200SB820>), which suspended the PFT for the 2020–21 school year. In addition, this statute addresses concerns raised about appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities and the use of body mass index (a weight and height calculation that has come under scrutiny in recent years) by requiring the CDE to consult with experts and other interested partners, including, but not limited to, individuals with expertise in fitness, adapted physical education, gender identity, body image, and pupils with disabilities in order to provide recommendations regarding the purpose and administration of the physical performance test. Per this statute, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction is required to submit a report with recommendations pursuant to subdivision (b) to the appropriate fiscal and policy committees of the Legislature, the Department of Finance, and the SBE on or before November 1, 2022.

Now that most California students have returned to in-person instruction, and PE classes have resumed in schools, LEAs have questions in anticipation of the administration of the PFT for the 2021–22 school year. A majority of the questions received from LEAs are in regard to students in grade nine and the Two-Year PE Exemption. In order for a student to meet the criteria for a Two- Year PE Exemption, the student must satisfactorily meet five out of the six HFZs on the PFT. Under *EC* 51241, this is the only PE exemption that may be granted as early as grade ten. Without the use of the Body Composition Component, this would change the language used in the *EC* Section 51241[b][1] in regard to the scoring of five out of six standards of the tests administered.

While the PFT study is in progress, the CDE is proposing a temporary solution for the administration of the PFT during the 2021–22 and 2022–23 school years: LEAs will be required to administer the FITNESSGRAM® without the use of the Body Composition Test component. All students in grades five, seven, and nine will continue to be tested on physical fitness using the FITNESSGRAM® assessments and the results recorded. PE classes will continue to stress the importance of physical and mental health as well as the importance of exercise according to ability. Each pupil with a physical disability and each pupil who is physically unable to take all of the physical performance test shall be given as much of the test as his or her condition will permit.

LEAs will be required to submit participation results as part of their annual School Accountability Report Card instead of results by HFZs, as was previously required.

Proposed emergency regulations are being developed and will be presented to the SBE in January 2022 for consideration and action. The *EC* citations that follow reference the legislation that is guiding the development of the proposed PFT emergency regulations.

*EC* Section 51222 (a) states:

All pupils, except pupils excused or exempted pursuant to Section 51241, shall be required to attend upon the courses of physical education for a total period of time of not less than 400 minutes each 10 schooldays.

While the *EC* states “All pupils” shall be required to attend courses in PE, California’s graduation requirements state that students need only take two courses in PE, unless the pupil has been exempted pursuant to the *EC*. *EC* sections 51241 and 51242 list six exemptions:

* If the student is ill and a modified program cannot be provided.
* If the student is enrolled for one-half, or less, time than normally required.
* If the student has satisfactorily met at least five of the six standards of the PFT.
* If the governing board of a school district or the office of the county superintendent grants a permanent exemption to a pupil who complies with one of the following:
  1. Is sixteen years old and has been enrolled in grade ten for one school year;
  2. Is enrolled as a postgraduate pupil; or
  3. Is enrolled in a juvenile home, ranch, camp, or forestry camp.
* If the student decides to take other courses in their junior and senior years instead of PE.
* If the student is engaged in a regular school-sponsored interscholastic athletic program.

The student’s participation—not performance, in terms of the HFZs—will be collected by their LEA.

## Attachment(s)

None.