

## Appropriate Use of *FITNESSGRAM*<sup>®</sup> / *ACTIVITYGRAM*<sup>®</sup> in a Comprehensive Physical Education Exemption Program

### A Statement from the *FITNESSGRAM*<sup>®</sup> / *ACTIVITYGRAM*<sup>®</sup> Scientific Advisors 2007

Several states have or are in the process of adopting *FITNESSGRAM* with the accompanying *ACTIVITYGRAM* as an educational tool for promoting physical activity and fitness among youth. The *FITNESSGRAM* / *ACTIVITYGRAM* Scientific Advisory Board views the adoption of a state fitness assessment tool as a positive step that provides educational and health benefits to the school-aged youth across the nation. In addition, regular tracking of physical fitness and activity patterns provides data for research that can help educators learn better ways of educating and promoting physical activity for youth.

As indicated in the *FITNESSGRAM* Reference Guide (see [www.fitnessgram.net](http://www.fitnessgram.net)), the primary goal of *FITNESSGRAM* and *ACTIVITYGRAM* is to facilitate learning about physical activity and physical fitness concepts and increase the likelihood that individuals will adopt lifetime patterns of physical activity (that lead to lifelong physical fitness and health). In the Reference Guide we outline the following appropriate uses of the *FITNESSGRAM* fitness test portion of the program. That list, as modified for this document, is included below:

- Personal testing to help students evaluate their level of health related fitness and allow parents to become better informed concerning student fitness levels,
- “Personal best” testing to allow individual students to privately determine performance levels,
- Institutional testing to allow teachers to view group data (for curriculum development),
- Teaching students about criterion referenced health standards and what types of activity are needed to reach them,
- Helping students track fitness results over time (e.g., in portfolios) and to help parents track fitness levels over time,
- Documenting that *FITNESSGRAM* is being administered in schools and student self-assessments are being tracked over time,
- Institutional testing to provide data for research.

State and school administrators have used *FITNESSGRAM* / *ACTIVITYGRAM* appropriately to accomplish many of the goals listed above. Recently, however, the use of scores on the fitness testing portion of the *FITNESSGRAM* / *ACTIVITYGRAM* as a method of exempting students from high school physical education classes has been a topic of discussion. At issue is whether students who “pass” *FITNESSGRAM* should be exempted from high school physical education, and if so, what constitutes “passing”.

Our Reference Guide, in the section on appropriate and inappropriate uses of *FITNESSGRAM*, specifically states that *FITNESSGRAM* should NOT be used to evaluate individual students in physical education (e.g., grading or state standards testing). In the Introduction to the Reference Guide (page 5) the following statement appears, “Recently educational leaders have developed achievement tests in a variety of areas (math, science, reading, etc.). In some cases these leaders have sought to develop tests for assessing student achievement in physical education.” Using physical fitness scores as the only indicator of student achievement of state physical education standards is considered to be an inappropriate practice. Using physical fitness test scores to exempt students from physical education would also be considered an inappropriate practice.

® *FITNESSGRAM* and *ACTIVITYGRAM* are registered trademarks of The Cooper Institute, Dallas, Texas.

Further, national standards for physical education (National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), and state standards based on NASPE standards, call for achievement of multiple outcomes prior to high school graduation. These outcomes, or characteristics of a physically educated person, are listed below:

**Table 1. NASPE Physical Education Standards (available online at address below)**

A physically educated person:

- **Standard 1:** Demonstrates competency in motor skills and movement patterns needed to perform a variety of physical activities.
- **Standard 2:** Demonstrates understanding of movement concepts, principles, strategies, and tactics as they apply to the learning and performance of physical activities.
- **Standard 3:** Participates regularly in physical activity.
- **Standard 4:** Achieves and maintains a health-enhancing level of physical fitness.
- **Standard 5:** Exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others in physical activity settings.
- **Standard 6:** Values physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and/or social interaction.

<http://www.ahperd.org/naspe/template.cfm?template=publication-nationalstandards.html>

Note: Physical fitness is only one of six important characteristics of a physically educated person.

To exempt a student from physical education solely on the basis of fitness test results would, in our opinion, be a serious mistake. If a student is to be exempted from the high school requirement, the student should be able to demonstrate competence in all areas outlined in the standards, NOT just physical fitness. Fitness is a transient state of being that is a very important objective of physical education, but it is only one of six important objectives. Further, fitness in youth is related as much to heredity, physiological maturity and age as it is to physical activity (see Reference Guide). Thus some youth will “pass” a fitness test because of factors other than student achievement.

Also at issue is what constitutes a “passing” score on the *FITNESSGRAM* fitness assessment portion of the program. The Scientific Advisory Board discourages reference to “passing” test items. The fitness assessments are designed to help students learn about their current levels of fitness and to use the information to plan appropriate physical activity programs to promote fitness in the healthy fitness zone. The level of fitness (within the healthy fitness zone) needed by any individual depends on individual needs. An important part of using *FITNESSGRAM* is to help students learn to use their personal fitness data to establish personal fitness goals and plan programs for meeting these personal goals.

### **Summary**

As noted at the beginning of the position paper, regular monitoring using *FITNESSGRAM* / *ACTIVITYGRAM* has many benefits and states using the program are to be commended for their many appropriate uses of the program. . The Scientific Advisory Board has taken great pains to provide a quality fitness and activity assessment program with scientifically based standards. Developing policy related to exemptions for high school physical education is beyond the purview of the *FITNESSGRAM* / *ACTIVITYGRAM* Scientific Advisory Board. However, the Board would like to go on record indicating that any exemption from high school physical education should be based on a comprehensive body of evidence that a student has met ALL important standards (objectives) of physical education programs. Further, the Board encourages “appropriate” uses and discourages “inappropriate” uses of the program.