



American Heart | American Stroke  
Association | Association

Learn and Live®

**Heart Disease and Stroke. You're the Cure.**

## Talking points for The 2009 SHAPE Act

### **The SHAPE Act: Separating Fact from Myth**

- **FACT#1: Today's school children are tomorrow's parents.** If we expect our parents to act responsibly when it comes to physical activity, nutrition and health, it is incumbent upon us to train the next generation of parents appropriately. This can only be done by instilling in our students a sense of importance and thorough understanding of health and physical activity. The 2009 SHAPE Act is an essential first step in making sure that happens.
- **FACT #2: P.E. is already required by law in schools, but some schools do not provide the requisite amount.** Although the DOE presently requires 90 contact hours of health and physical education per year (roughly 30 minutes a day) for grades K-5, a recent study suggests that some schools do not require the amount prescribed by law (*Georgia Youth Fitness Assessment 2006*, The Philanthropic Collaborative for a Healthy Georgia, published September 2007).
- **FACT #3: If Georgia doesn't act now, it will pay the price later.** The 2009 SHAPE ACT offers a fiscally conservative answer to a critical public health concern. No other solution offers as much "bang for the buck" as the SHAPE Act. It is essentially free, but promises to save the state millions down the road in healthcare costs and productivity losses.
- **MYTH #1: The 2009 SHAPE Act mandates Body Mass Index, or "BMI" testing.** Unlike last year's version of the SHAPE Act, it does not. The new and improved version of the bill makes no mention whatsoever of body mass index, or "BMI" measurements. The does require an assessment for students that are *already enrolled* in a physical education class. Just as we test our students in every other school subject, so should they be tested in physical fitness. It is also important for us to collect the aggregate data resulting from these assessments to establish a baseline of information for future policy and curriculum decisions.
- **MYTH #2: This bill will be costly, and amounts to an unfunded mandate on schools.** The Office of Legislative Counsel has suggested that the bill imparts NO COST TO THE STATE. The 2009 SHAPE Act does not make any curriculum changes and the above mentioned fitness assessment will be conducted once a year in regularly scheduled P.E. classes only. The assessment data will be collected and monitored by existing faculty/staff - professional P.E. teachers in class will assess the children's level of fitness, and will report the data to the newly created/hired Health and Physical Education Coordinator at the DOE. Finally, the 2009 SHAPE Act gives the Department of Education the flexibility to choose how much or how little they want to spend on the actual test to assess student fitness, and enables/encourages them to seek private funding to cover that cost.
- **MYTH #3: The 2009 SHAPE Act adds physical education minutes to Georgia public schools' curriculum.** In fact, the bill does not mandate any additions to the public school curriculum, but rather gives the Department of Education a means to assess, encourage and reward the implementation of physical education requirements that are *already* required by law.
- **MYTH #4: Childhood obesity is a problem, but it's not a school problem, it's a parent problem.** Childhood obesity is a result of many factors, and parents and educators each bear some responsibility in correcting the problem. During the school year, students spend many of their waking hours in a school environment, and many students eat two of their three meals in our public schools. There's no denying the impact that the school environment has on a child's physical health (SEE ALSO FACT #1).
- **MYTH #5: The 2009 SHAPE Act place negative labels on those schools that do not meet the requirements of the bill.** This is another one of the many changes from the 2008 version of the bill. Advocates, educators and the State Board of Education agreed that the new legislation should encourage compliance to existing law by rewarding school systems rather than acting punitively. The only acknowledgement of the assessments will be to reward and/or recognize those schools that excel in this area.

Know the Stats:

- The prevalence of childhood obesity in Georgia is staggering with 15,000 2-4 year olds; 28,000 3rd grade children; 43,000 middle school students; and 62,000 high school students falling above the 95th percentile for BMI. Our obesity rates are significantly higher than those of other states, and our children are more severely overweight;
- Research conducted by the Department of Human Resources (DHR) indicates that the percentage of obese children in Georgia is 4 times higher than the 5 percent expected;
- Nearly 1 in 3 children in Georgia are obese or overweight;
- Obesity during childhood leads to a number of related health conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, asthma, hypertension, sleep apnea, depression, decreased self esteem, and type II diabetes. New studies have even suggested a link between obesity and cancer;
- Childhood obesity is the greatest predictor of obesity during adulthood; approximately 80 percent of children who are overweight at age 10 will be obese adults at age 25;
- Obesity is costly to Georgia as well. Our state spends \$2.1 billion per year in costs associated with obesity from childhood through adulthood. Approximately \$385 million of this amount is paid for by Medicaid, which represents 10 percent of the total Medicaid budget;
- Current regulations by the Georgia DOE require 90 contact hours per year (roughly 30 minutes a day) of health and physical education in grades K-5, and that schools with grades 6-12 "shall make available instruction in health and physical education;"
- For high schools, the DOE only requires students to have one-half credit of physical education and one-half credit of health education to graduate;
- Unfortunately, these requirements are often not met by elementary and middle schools; a recent survey of schools indicated that some elementary schools do not require physical education, even though state law requires it; still more indicated they offered some level of physical education, but not the amount required by law;
- Ultimately, school-based physical activity and nutrition programs are critical components of a comprehensive strategy for addressing the childhood obesity epidemic.