

Prof helps develop new fitness curriculum

By Scott Honn
Reporter

Recent evaluations showing that Texas school children are becoming more obese and more out of shape has prompted a Texas A&M researcher to help develop a new physical education curriculum for the state's public schools.

Dr. Elvin Smith, professor of medical physiology and co-chairman of a task force reporting to Gov. Mark White's commission on physical fitness, says a 1984 statewide fitness test of more than 6,000 students showed significant declines in fitness and endurance over 1974 levels.

"Texas children are becoming more obese," Smith said, "and it's becoming more the norm than the exception."

The task force has proposed a new physical education curriculum that will increase the amount of physical education in Texas public school systems.

"The majority of physical education programs, especially on the high school level, are grossly inadequate," Smith said.

The task force has devised a new fitness test for students, from kindergarten through high school, that will measure a student's physical fitness, Smith said.

In addition to the test, Smith has helped design new curriculum recommendations for physical education classes. These proposals are currently being reviewed by White, the Texas Education Agency and other state education leaders.

"One of the things we are asking for in our proposal is a requirement for every student to take physical education every year," Smith said.

Students are only required to take one and a half years of physical education in high school under the current curriculum, he said.

A student can get a waiver

from physical education for just about anything, he said. Smith said band, drill team, choir, and various other activities can exempt a student from physical education.

"A student should not be allowed to substitute one course for another when the courses do not reach the same endpoint," Smith said.

Smith said the new test will be piloted in selected school districts next fall. Details of the new test will not be available until June. He said the test will concentrate on endurance and overall fitness, rather than on athletic skills.

In the past, the tests have been a measure of athletic ability and not physical fitness, he said. The new test will define fitness and be used as a teaching element.

Smith said the new test will emphasize aerobic activities such as swimming, bicycling and running.

Another exercise that will be prominent in the new test is sit-

ups. Smith said sit-ups can strengthen the abdominal muscles and increase flexibility.

"Weakness in these areas greatly increases the chance for lower back problems," Smith said, "which is one of the most common ailments in the country."

It is imperative for a child to be physically fit, he said, otherwise society will pay a high cost in the future.

Smith said evidence suggests that maintaining physical fitness helps prevent cardiovascular diseases.

"Heart disease is the No. 1 killer in America today," he said, "and I think we should do anything we can to curtail the No. 1 killer."

"It makes little sense to teach the basics of education in such a manner that the development of physical fitness is neglected when this neglect can increase the chance of an early death."

Police officer rescues prisoner from burning cell

CHILDRESS (AP) — Walter Abbott hadn't even been elected to the post of police chief, but he quickly found what being in the line of fire really means.

Abbott, 25, was in a hospital Saturday night when he learned he had defeated incumbent Bob Groves in the police chief's race.

After arresting a man on charges of misdemeanor assault and disorderly conduct earlier in the day, Abbott put the man in a jail cell.

About 40 minutes later, Abbott learned of a fire in the cell. Abbott, after two other tries, finally was able to withstand the heat in the cell and drag the prisoner out. Both were hospitalized.

Authorities said felony charges would be filed against the prisoner, who allegedly set his mattress and blankets on fire.

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