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EDITORIAL

Childhood obesity on state's radar

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8:12 AM Tuesday, November 24, 2009

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We don't mean to ruin anyone's Thanksgiving dinner, but a problem we've been calling attention to for more than a year — childhood obesity rates — has finally gotten the attention of Ohio lawmakers.

The Columbus Dispatch has described "a new, powerful coalition of businesses and health-care advocates (that) is pushing for statewide standards designed to make Ohio students healthier" and is getting behind new bipartisan legislation, introduced in Columbus last week, to address the growing problem of childhood obesity.

The legislation comes on the heels of last week's report from an Emory University expert that half of Ohioans will be obese in another 10 years, if trends do not change. Currently the figure stands at an already-alarming 34 percent. That number — one in three — is about the same for Ohio's child population. And you likely read the recent report that ranked Ohio 10th in the nation for the fattest adults and 15th for the fattest children.

A little closer to home, we were concerned last year to learn that a body-mass index (BMI) survey of students in the Middletown City School District showed that 43 percent of elementary students, 47.9 percent of middle-school students, and 57.15 percent of high schoolers were obese, overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. Those numbers are probably similar in other Butler County school districts.

Keeping track of students' BMI is one of the requirements of the new "Healthy Choices of Healthy Children" legislation that was introduced simultaneously in both the Ohio House and Senate last week. While we applaud the goals, the legislation relies on public schools — once again — to take

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responsibility for duties that parents sadly neglect.

The legislation's requirements include:

- Schools must provide 30 minutes of moderate to rigorous physical activity daily for students.
- Offering more nutritious foods and beverages in school-operated venues and vending machines.
- High school students will need one full unit of physical education, instead of one-half unit.
- Students' body-mass index will be measured when they enter school in the third, fifth and ninth grades.
- Educating parents about their children's BMI and the associated health risks.

While we applaud the goal of reducing childhood obesity (and hopefully teaching our children lifelong lessons for managing their weight), we can't help but notice some irony in connection with this legislation, which is co-sponsored by Republican and Democratic lawmakers.

The irony? Those who oppose national health care reform might consider this legislation an intrusion by state government into personal health-care matters, too — and a bit of an overreach. After all, our schools — already struggling to meet proficiency test standards and annual yearly progress expectations — are now going to be responsible for students' physical fitness and weight, too? Feel free to get involved at any point, parents.

On the flip side, one could make the case that state lawmakers — if they are serious about this health crisis — should include some teeth in the legislation in regard to parents who fail to pay heed to the BMI reports. Aren't parents who ignore their child's excessive weight putting them at risk of health problems? And we have children protective services agencies for parents who put their children at risk, don't we? That view would obviously be a stretch, but we don't see how the legislation holds parents accountable.

Clearly, while the goals are laudable, this growing problem may be more complex than state lawmakers understand. And it's either another attempt by Columbus to micro-manage the lives of Ohioans, or a feel-good measure that lets lawmakers say they have taken strong action. Maybe it's both.

In any event, we continue to believe that the issue of overweight children is a serious concern and we welcome the state Legislature's desire to address it. We're just not certain that our schools alone can reverse the trends without significant buy-in from parents and guardians, many of whom are likely fighting their own weight issues. Putting an entire state on a diet isn't going to be easy.

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You hit the nail on the head Zipper. Can't buy much food with "change"

Rick
9:49 AM, 11/30/2009

REPORT ABUSE

This is not the responsibility of the govt. Parents should take better care of thier children. You often see overweight parents struggling with overweith children. This is so demeaning to children. They feel like an outcast, they are ridiculed and left out. The parents are too busy to care what is best for thier children. All they do is eat junk and make excuses. If it is a medical problem, please address it for your kids. If you have them, take care of them.

sam
4:20 PM, 11/27/2009

REPORT ABUSE

As so many have commented in the past few months...

MORE GOVERNMENT = LESS FREEDOM

huh..
8:56 AM, 11/26/2009

REPORT ABUSE

"Putting an entire state on a diet isn't going to be easy."

Sure it will. After ObamaCare, Cap & Tax, and the other tax hikes that are on the way, we won't be able to afford food.

Zipper
4:37 PM, 11/25/2009

REPORT ABUSE


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