

# AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

## **Overweight in Ohio**

**A reasonable plan to educate students about eating and exercise**

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Weight-related health problems have become so pervasive among children that health experts regard obesity as a national epidemic. Ohio's high school students rank fourth in the nation for excess pounds. One in three children in Ohio is overweight by age 8. Aside from medical conditions, it's no secret how children grow heavy: They eat too much of the wrong kinds of foods and don't get enough physical exercise.

The combination is driving up rates of Type 2 diabetes, joint problems, high cholesterol and high blood pressure among children. The projection is a child who is obese at 10 is 80 percent more likely to grow into an obese adult, facing a higher risk of health problems, including heart and respiratory diseases.

Thus, appropriately, the Healthy Choices for Healthy Children bill approved last week by the state Senate Health, Human Services and Aging Committee (and a companion bill in the House, H.B. 373) aims to guide children toward a lifetime of healthy habits, with the schools as the primary vehicle.

The bill would require schools to incorporate at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity a day, provide nutritious meals and snacks (enrolling eligible children in the free breakfast program) and adhere to state-approved physical education standards, including instruction in nutrition, fitness and health. Schools also would screen and report body mass index for children in specified

grades. A physical education indicator would be included on district report cards from the state.

Understandably, school officials fear the bill would further squeeze tight schedules and budgets. The legislation recognizes as much, offering a waiver option for the half-hour activity. Yet important to keep in mind is the larger consideration: A healthy, active child is a better student. Besides, epidemics are a collective threat. Preventing obesity in childhood reduces the likelihood and cost of weight-related illnesses later. Ohio will not reduce obesity merely by recognizing it but by mobilizing to counter the causes. The schools are a good starting point.