

# The Columbus Dispatch

## Changes leave school-exercise bill a 98-pound weakling

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BY **JIM SIEGEL**

Public-school officials beat back efforts by some legislators, businesses and health-care professionals to require that schools provide students 30 minutes of exercise per day.

"They were able to pick off members individually," Rep. John Patrick Carney, D-Columbus, said of the school-board members, teachers-union representatives and superintendents who urged legislators to reject the exercise requirement in Senate Bill 210.

The measure already had been watered down by the Senate, allowing districts to opt out of the exercise requirement by getting a waiver from the state. But school officials told House members that the opt-out wasn't good enough because the requirement still would hang over districts' heads in permanent law, and the state was not providing money to pay for it.

A House committee changed the bill today so that districts that want to meet the daily exercise requirement would have to opt into it. The House passed it 77-21.

"I am disappointed," said Carney, who sponsored the House version of the bill. He noted that obesity is the nation's No. 1 preventable health crisis, surpassing smoking.

"Having it as a waiver or an opt-out, there would have been pressure from the local community to encourage districts to do it," he said.

Supporters of the bill, including Dr. Steve Allen, CEO of Nationwide Children's Hospital, argued that children spend a lot of time in school, and exercise should be part of a comprehensive effort to attack childhood obesity.

School officials countered that not only is there no money, but the 30 minutes per day would cut into core classroom teaching.

The bill, which needs final Senate approval, would start requiring schools to offer healthier options for food sold a la carte and beverages, including vending machines.

Some Republicans complained about placing mandates on schools, but Rep. Lynn Wachtmann, R-Napoleon, said the "bill barely is a mandate, if it is at all. Taking a first - maybe it's a small step - but a first step to deal with obesity is worth doing in this state."

In other legislative business:

Talks continued on a proposed ballot issue designed to improve the hyper-political process for drawing legislative districts in 2011.

Sen. Jon Husted, R-Kettering, said he was continuing to try to forge a compromise using parts of his plan and one passed recently by the House, which is controlled by Democrats. The 11th rewrite of the bill used Husted's proposed seven-member commission, but included the rules for a map-drawing contest from the House bill, which focuses on creating competitive districts.

"We're making progress," Husted said, noting the balancing act, in which some changes were picking up Democratic support in the House but losing Republican senators - or vice versa.

"This is the one time we have something to do that can have a lasting difference that will matter for generations in Ohio," Husted said.

House Speaker Armond Budish, D-Beachwood, said he didn't know if the compromise would come together before legislators depart for summer break either Thursday night or next week, but said he is "working in good faith to try to come up with something."

Some key details remain under discussion, including how much leeway the commission should get to alter submitted maps.

Husted said he was willing to exclude congressional districts from the measure at the insistence of House Democrats.

Although Senate Minority Leader Capri S. Cafaro, D-Hubbard, agreed with the decision, Sen. Ray Miller, D-Columbus, was sharply opposed. "That is where we've had our most blatant cases of racial gerrymandering," Miller said, noting that Ohio has just one black U.S. House member.

The Senate yesterday also gave final approval to Senate Bill 58, sponsored by Sen. Jim Hughes, R-Clintonville, which makes it a crime to collect urine or other bodily fluids from another person without permission. The bill stems from a central Ohio case in which a man was collecting and drinking the urine of young boys.