

JournalNews

‘Healthy Children’ bill combats obesity

New law would mean student BMI tests, healthier lunch choices, daily exercise.

By Dave Larsen, Staff Writer

Friday, June 4, 2010

COLUMBUS — A bipartisan bill to combat childhood obesity that requires healthier options in school cafeterias, and provides for body mass index screenings of students and a pilot program for daily physical activity during the school day was approved by both chambers of the Ohio Legislature, Thursday, June 3.

The Healthy Choices for Healthy Children bill will be signed into law by Gov. Ted Strickland, said Amanda Wurst, the governor’s spokeswoman.

The bill focuses on decreasing and preventing childhood obesity in Ohio schools through healthier food and beverage options; changes to physical education instructor requirements; body mass index (BMI) screenings upon school entry and in third,

fifth and ninth grades; and a pilot program to encourage 30 minutes of daily physical activity for students.

One in three children born in Ohio is overweight by age 8, said Sen. Kevin Coughlin, R-Cuyahoga Falls, a co-sponsor of the bill.

“Because children spend seven hours a day in school there are some options within schools that can really improve children’s health,” said Jessica Saunders, Children’s Medical Center of Dayton’s community relations manager.

The legislation allows for a parental opt-out and a waiver option for schools that may be unable to comply with BMI screenings, which plot a measure of weight and height with age on a specific gender graph.

Baker Middle School in Fairborn has been tracking the BMI of sixth-grade students for five years, said Paula Montgomery, Fairborn City Schools’ childhood nutrition supervisor.

The district has gradually replaced unhealthy snacks with fresh fruits and vegetables over the same period. “We’re interested in building healthier students,” Montgomery said.

BMI data can be used to measure a district or county’s progress over time, Saunders said. It also can indicate if a student is at increased risk for becoming overweight or chronic diseases such as diabetes.