Statewide Physical Fitness Testing and Students with Disabilities in Texas

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The importance of health fitness for our students’ quality of life is clearly a focus of the State of Texas through the passage of Senate Bill 530. According to this law “a school district annually shall assess the physical fitness of students in grades 3 to 12. A school district is not required to assess a student for whom, as a result of disability or other condition identified by commissioner rule, the assessment instrument adopted under Section 38.102 is inappropriate” (Texas Education Agency, 2007, §38.101). The first step to determine the present health status of all our students in grades 3 to 12 is to determine their present level of physical fitness. In Texas the FITNESSGRAM (Cooper Institute, 2007) has been selected as the statewide fitness test to be used. Although Senate Bill 530 states that a district is not required to assess a student for whom the instrument is inappropriate, it is our contention, based on No Child Left Behind (2001) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), that an alternative assessment must be used unless there is a written medical exemption.

As in the statewide assessment in math, science, and social studies, there are a few students who are disabled that may require an alternative assessment method to be used and even a smaller number who would be exempt. A general rule of thumb would be an estimated 3% or less of the special education school population may require alternative assessments in these academic areas as stated above (Council of Exceptional Children, 2007). We are making the assumption that the 3% figure or less also is appropriately related to physical fitness assessment.

The FITNESSGRAM only provides one alternative test (i.e., Brockport Physical Fitness Test, Winnick & Short, 1999); however, there are numerous other assessment instruments that can be used depending on the students’ strengths and weaknesses.
The following are some examples of alternative forms of evaluations. These examples can be placed on a continuum from (a) those that are *FITNESSGRAM*-like with standards, (b) those with *FITNESSGRAM*-type test items but no standards, and (c) those without *FITNESSGRAM* items but authentic tasks used in daily life requiring a minimal level of motor skills and physical fitness that may or may not have standards. In a very few cases, students with confirmed written medical contraindications may be exempt from physical fitness testing. Each category along the continuum is illustrated in the following figure. For a more extensive explanation of the different forms of evaluation, the reader is referred to the second edition of the *Texas Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance Adapted Physical Education Manual of Best Practices: Administrative Guidelines & Policies* (Silliman-French, accepted), Jansma (1999), or Horvat, Kelly, and Block (2007). For inservice training on any of these assessments or assessment opportunities, please contact Diane Everett, diana@tahperd.org, Executive Director for the Texas Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance.
**FITNESSGRAM** (Cooper Institute, 2007)

CA = 5 to 17 years and older
Scores = Need to do a minimum of 6 of the items listed below.

Items = PACER, One-mile run, Walk test, Skinfold measure, Body Mass Index, Curl-up, Trunk lift, 90% Push-up, Pull-up, Modified pull-up, Flexed arm hang, Back-saver sit and reach, and Shoulder stretch.

Standardized for individuals without disabilities (use if appropriate for students with disabilities).

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**Brockport Physical Fitness Test**
(Winnick & Short, 1999)

CA = 10 to 17 years

Scores = Need to administer a minimum of 4 to 6 of the items listed below.

Items = *FITNESSGRAM* items and Target aerobic movement test, Reverse curl, Seated push-up, 40-m Push/Walk, W/C ramp test, Hand weight press, Bench press, Grip strength, Isometric push-up, Extended arm hang, Trunk lift, Modified curl-up, Target stretch test, Modified Apley test, and Thomas test.


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**Project Transition**
(Jansma, Ersing, & McCubbin, 1986)

CA = 3 to 18 years

Items = Flexed knee sit-up (arms crossed), Lower back and hamstring flexibility, Abdominal strength/endurance, Bench press, and Sit and reach.

Criterion referenced and originally designed for individuals with severe intellectual disabilities.

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**Authentic Assessments**

Standing, Walking, Lifting body parts, Tolerance for sitting/standing, Fundamental cardiorespiratory fitness, Reach, Grasp, Dexterity, and Positioning.


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**Figure 1.** Continuum of suggested *alternative* assessments if the *FITNESSGRAM* is not appropriate.
References


Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1400, et seq.


