

14. Physical Fitness

What It Is

The California Physical Fitness Test measures six fitness standards: aerobic capacity, body composition, abdominal strength, trunk extension strength, upper body strength, and flexibility. Standards are established for each of these six areas. Students need to meet all six standards to be considered physically fit.

Why It Is Important

Physical fitness improves memory, concentration, and energy level. Physical fitness in childhood provides the foundation for improved health outcomes in later life through building good nutrition and exercise habits. The American Heart Association recommends that children ages five and older should get at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise each day, and at least 30 minutes or more of vigorous exercise at least three to four days per week. Regular exercise and physical activity keep a child fit and reduce the likelihood of obesity, which is an increasing problem for children nationwide. The rise in childhood obesity stems from many factors, originating in part from a more sedentary lifestyle and consumption of high-calorie foods. Further, many schools have reduced physical education classes and fewer children walk or bike to school than in the past.

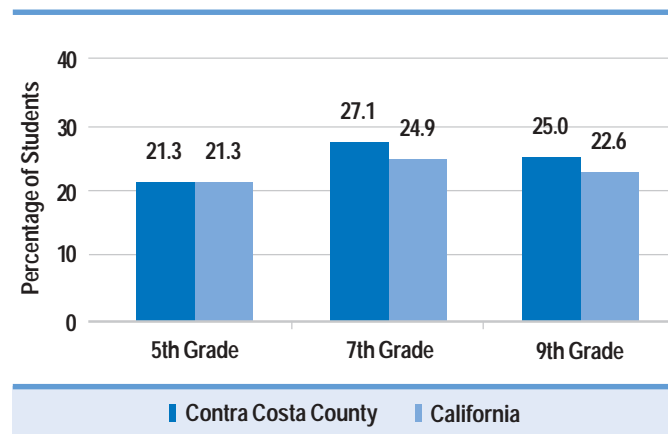
How We Are Doing

In 2001, 21.3% of Contra Costa County children in grade 5 were physically fit, which is equal to the percentage statewide. Students in grades 7 and 9 were slightly more fit than students statewide, 27.1% compared to 24.9% for seventh graders, and 25% compared to 22.6% for ninth graders.

Data Development

More data is needed on pediatric obesity, which is increasing nationwide and is linked to an alarming rise in the incidence of Type II diabetes. Please refer to the Data Development Agenda section of this report for more information.

Figure 14.1 — Percentage of Physically Fit Students, 2001



Source: California Department of Education, California Physical Fitness Test, 2003.

Note: Students meeting six of six fitness standards are considered to be fit.

