

State assesses physical education

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It's been four years since passage of the law requiring all Minnesota schools to include physical education, and lawmakers now want to know how it's working. According to State Rep. Kim Norton, the standards have been implemented by all districts, so today they'll introduce a bill asking for a report on the status.

"We're going to ask the Department of Education to take a look at that and find out, what's the state of physical education in our school districts, assessing the school districts' implementation of the standards and what's offered, and what isn't," she said.

The CDC recommends that elementary school children receive 150 minutes of phys. ed. per week, and that increases to 225 minutes per week in middle school and high school.

In addition to finding out how much physical activity time kids are getting, Norton said, the report would also look at how schools are measuring and assessing pupils' fitness, key to both learning and health.

"Childhood obesity has tripled in the last 30 years," she noted. "It's just really a concern when you know that children of today are going to have a lower life expectancy than their parents did. This is the first time we've seen that."

The report on physical education in schools is one of several priorities this session from what's called the Childhood Obesity Legislative Working Group. Another key piece of legislation they're pursuing is called "Safe Routes to School," said State Rep. and long time phys. ed. teacher Bob Dettmer.

"We're trying to encourage communities, when they do road work, that they put in sidewalks, provide safe routes that students can walk, ride bicycles to school where they aren't crossing busy streets, things like that. "

Dettmer said the group is also supporting a bill to expand access to free school lunches and a measure that would institute a sports-related childhood obesity pilot program.

More information is at www.house.leg.state.mn.us and at www.education.state.mn.us .