

Penny wise, pound foolish — the demise of phys-ed

By scrimping on schools and cutting P.E., we have created a tubby generation

Most Oregonians with school-age children undoubtedly recall that many school districts made significant program cuts as a result of 1990's Measure 5. Most districts chose to cut physical education programs more dramatically than other programs, leaving few opportunities for students to become as healthy and productive as they can be. What's more, when Oregon's 1995 Legislature approved the development of the Certificate of Initial Mastery, the CIM excluded two subjects from state standards: health and physical education.

Is it any wonder then, that in Oregon, 25 percent of our youth are obese? More than 40 percent of children between 5 and 8 years old have at least one risk factor for heart disease, the nation's top killer.

There is a growing body of evidence to show that individuals who pursue activity on a regular and sustained basis enjoy a higher quality of life and prevent premature death from many causes, including heart



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disease, colon cancer and diabetes. How sad, then, that this current generation of students is the least fit of any ever assessed.

One way Oregonians can address this dire situation is to support House Bill 3307, sponsored by Rep. Ron Sunseri, R-Gresham, and Sen. Cliff Trow, D-Corvallis, reinstating physical education to the "first tier" of subject matter within the CIM. Oregon would need to spend \$2 million to \$3 million to develop these physical education standards. But those numbers are minuscule when compared with rising health insurance pre-

miums and the fact that 17 percent of our gross domestic product was spent on health care in 1998.

The American Medical Association, the American Heart Association, the American Cancer Society and the American Academy of Pediatrics have all stressed the need for quality, daily physical education opportunities for all K-through-12 students.

And, yes, such education costs are significant. But how can we afford to continue paying hundreds of millions of dollars more each biennium in added health care and insurance costs? Oregon's politicians and school board members are the ones responsible for rectifying this serious situation. Why not spend some of Oregon's tobacco settlement — about \$70 million next year — on expanding physical education for Oregon's youth? Is there any wiser investment we could make in a healthy, productive future for our children?

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