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Comptroller Releases Information on Physical Activity in Schools

Three new infographics from the Comptroller's Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) examine physical education and physical activity in Tennessee's schools. May is National Physical Fitness and Sports Month.

The infographics include color-coded maps showing Tennessee high school students ranked below the national rate for being both physically active and attending physical education class based on a 2013 national survey of high school students' health-related behaviors.

Approximately 25 percent of Tennessee high school students indicated they were physically active for one hour per day; the national rate was 27.1 percent. The national rate for high school students who attended physical education class at least once per week was 48 percent; Tennessee's rate was 40.1 percent.

The Comptroller's infographics also explain the differences between physical activity and physical education.

Physical activity includes activities such as recess or walking. Tennessee law currently requires that elementary and secondary students receive at least 90 minutes per week of physical activity, but beginning on July 1, 2016, state law will begin requiring the equivalent of 225 minutes per week for grades K-1 and 160 minutes for grades 2-6. The current requirement for grades 7-12 of 90 minutes per week will remain unchanged. Schools are prohibited by law from counting walking between classes toward meeting the physical activity requirement.

Unlike physical activity, which includes free play during recess, physical education is a standards-based program of instruction. Tennessee schools must provide P.E. programs annually, though a minimum number of minutes or days per week is not currently required.

The nationally recommended amount of physical education for high school students is 225 minutes per week. No states currently meet the recommended amount, though some specify a minimum number of minutes per week.

Tennessee students must obtain a one-half credit of physical education in order to graduate from high school.

The three infographics are available on the Comptroller's website at <http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/orea/Index>

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