



FITNESSGRAM[®] Statement on Body Composition Reporting

FITNESSGRAM is a comprehensive educational, reporting and promotional tool used to assess physical fitness and physical activity levels for children. Research shows that healthy and fit children have less absenteeism, are better able to learn, have higher self-esteem and are at lower risk for developing chronic diseases. Therefore, a key goal in quality physical education is to provide youth (and parents) with information about children's level of health related fitness.

This is where FITNESSGRAM comes into play. FITNESSGRAM, created in 1982, provides teachers with an established battery of physical fitness assessments including measures of aerobic capacity, muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility, and body composition. A unique aspect of FITNESSGRAM is that children's fitness levels are evaluated using criterion-based standards that reflect the amount of fitness needed for good health. The complete FITNESSGRAM report provides a snapshot of a child's overall fitness as it relates to health. The assessment also provides the starting point for developing physical activity plans to improve fitness.

The Cooper Institute and the FITNESSGRAM Scientific Advisory Board believe it is important to educate youth (and parents) about health related fitness - and this includes information about appropriate levels of body composition. Youth who are overweight are at a higher risk for becoming overweight adults. Therefore, by maintaining a healthy weight a child can potentially reduce their future risk of health problems, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes and heart disease. Very low levels of body fat may also indicate future health risks. Though some body fat is needed for overall good health, too much can lead to health problems. Body composition can be influenced by many factors, including age, gender, heredity, and lifestyle habits.

It is important to understand that assessments of body composition provide information about the proportion of total fat mass and fat-free mass within the body. Fat-free body mass includes bones, muscles, and other tissues. Your child's body composition may be assessed through a measure called body mass index (BMI), a bioelectric impedance (BIA) device, or through a skinfold test. BIA devices and skinfold tests provide an estimation of students' percent body fat but the commonly used BMI score does not. The BMI measures a student's weight relative to height and is highly correlated with body fatness in most individuals. However, BMI does not take into account muscle mass and some children with high levels of muscle mass may receive a score indicating that they are "overweight" or in the Needs Improvement Zone. The BMI provides useful information for most children (and is important for school level tracking) but it is possible that the score may misclassify youth with more muscle mass or athletic builds. It is important to keep this in mind when interpreting this measure. The following educational vignette provides information about assessments of Body Composition: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61k7MmtoFFc>