

# The Texas Foreign Language Association

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*The Texas Foreign Language Association represents teachers of Languages Other Than English (LOTE) and currently has a membership of 2500 teachers. It publishes a Journal which includes information about each legislative session.*

TO: Members of the State Board of Education  
RE: **SB42 and its potential impact on middle school students in Texas**  
FROM: Phyllis B. Thompson  
DATE: April 21, 2006

**For the Texas Foreign Language Association, the first preference is to allow the question of physical activity requirements to remain a local control issue. Local school boards can determine the physical activity requirements that best meet the needs of the community. If the SBOE chooses to write a rule relating to this issue, we strongly encourage that it include *all the flexibility* allowed by SB42.**

We are all concerned for the need for a healthy and well-balanced lifestyle, which includes developing a wide variety of interests and skills, such as exploring music, art, technology, and languages other than English. In middle school students find the broader range of electives part the exciting new adventure. These new areas of interest can be the deciding factor that motivates them to do well, to stay in school, to begin vocational decisions, and to become life-long learners.

Students should be able to explore elective courses such as music, art, and languages other than English. Currently, many middle school students explore both fine arts and LOTE. They take music or art in the sixth grade and then also elect a language other than English in the seventh and eight grades. Research shows they benefit from beginning these subjects earlier, rather than later in their education. Students also acquire greater proficiency in these areas through a rigorous sequential curriculum over an extended period of time, in this case both middle and high school. We do not want to force some of our brightest students to have to choose between another language and music or art.

Strong languages other than English programs help students both explore some of their own cultures and appreciate other cultures, very important in Texas where there are persons of many cultures. Students can also get ahead in the recommended high school program by taking advantage of middle school language programs. Students can only start a new instrument in middle school, not later.

Unfortunately, elective opportunities for middle school students are diminishing as districts make curricula changes and double block English and/or math to focus on TAKS assessment. In 2003 9% (65,602) of students studying languages other than English were in middle school. In 2005 7% (55,833) of students studying languages other than English were in middle school. This decline in Texas is happening at the same time that commerce is increasingly international and President Bush has launched the National Security Language Initiative, a plan to further strengthen national security and prosperity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through education, especially in developing foreign language skills.

The inclusion of a mandatory physical activity requirement for *all* students in middle school would further reduce options for middle school students. It could seriously reduce the enrollment in other programs like languages other than English, music, and art. It would therefore weaken them or result in the elimination of these programs entirely in middle school. This would be a grave loss for the middle school curriculum and also adversely affect the high school curriculum.

A physical education requirement for *all* students may not be appropriate or necessary. Some students are already involved in after-or-before-school sports programs. Others have enough physical activity through hobbies and other interests. Parent Teacher Associations can help educate parents on the necessity of physical activity without diminishing the richness of academic programs. Local districts could adopt measures that are appropriate to their community.

While SB19 applied to elementary school, a similar approach is not necessarily appropriate for middle school. The curriculum and the time constraints are very different.

Hence, we respectfully request that the SBOE allow the question of physical activity requirements to remain a local control issue. If the SBOE chooses to write a rule relating to this issue, we strongly encourage that it include *all the flexibility* allowed by SB42.