

Health Disparities in the Medi-Cal Population

Childhood Physical Fitness



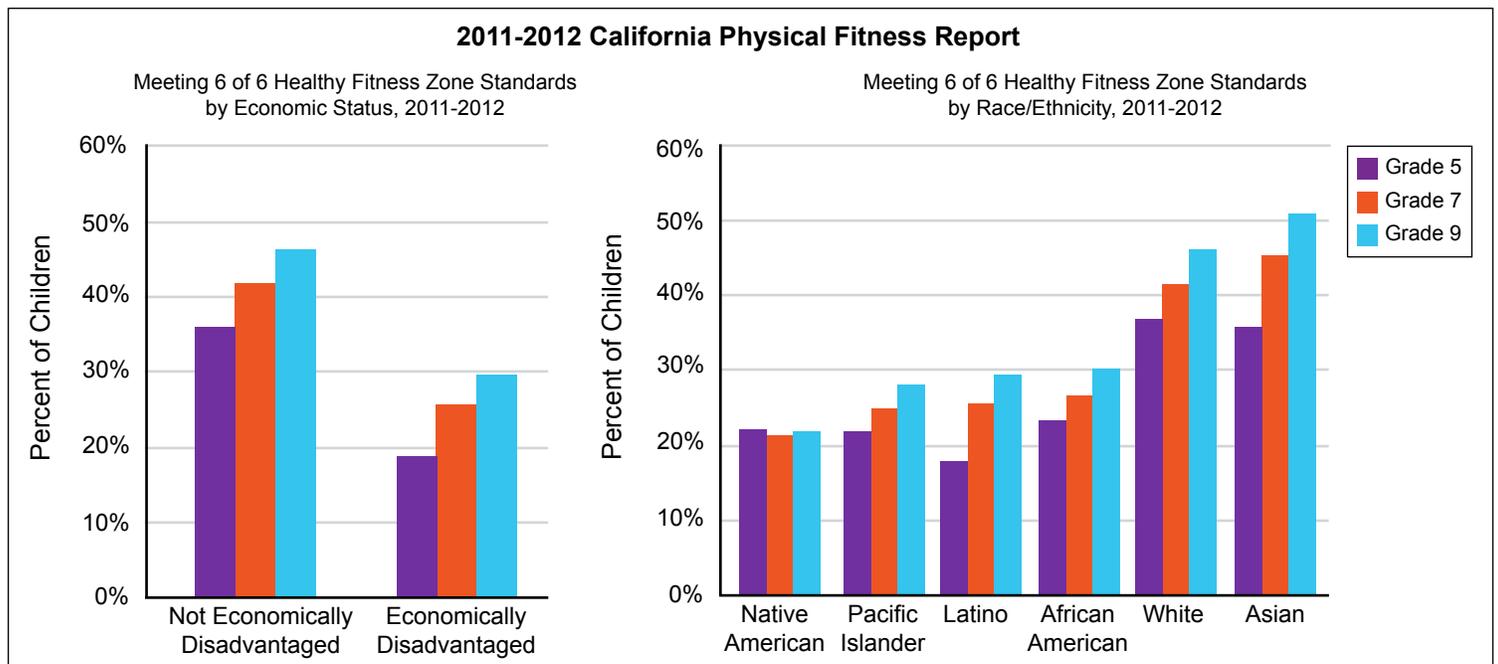
Physical activity is associated with many positive health outcomes.¹ For children, it is important to develop an active lifestyle in the early years of life, since habits from early childhood through adolescence may influence habits in adulthood.² Moreover, the increasing prevalence of childhood obesity suggests that poor diet and physical inactivity need to be improved for immediate health impacts.³

California students in grades five, seven, and nine receive a physical fitness test called the FITNESSGRAM®. The six-part test is used to evaluate levels of fitness that offer protection from diseases associated with inactivity. The test showed that children categorized as “economically disadvantaged” or “not economically disadvantaged” differ in their ability to complete all of the six fitness requirements.⁴ The California Department of Education classifies children as economically disadvantaged if they participate in the free or reduced price meal program, or if their parents’ education level was coded as “not high school graduate.”



As shown in the Figure below, economically disadvantaged children—those more likely to be in the Medi-Cal system—were less likely to complete all six of the fitness requirements. In addition, there were substantial disparities by race/ethnicity. Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, Latinos, and African Americans were less likely to meet all six fitness requirements as compared to Whites and Asians.

Figure



Source: California Department of Education, DataQuest, 2011-2012.

1. Powell KE, Paluch AE, Blair SN. Physical activity for health: What kind? How much? How intense? On top of what? *Annu Rev Public Health*. 2011;32.
2. Anzman S, Rollins B, Birch L. Parental influence on children's early eating environments and obesity risk: implications for prevention. *Int J Obes*. 2010;34(7):1116-1124.
3. Ebbeling CB, Pawlak DB, Ludwig DS. Childhood obesity: Public-health crisis, common sense cure. *The Lancet*. 2002;360(9331):473-482.
4. California Department of Education Dataquest; 2010-2011; California Fitness Report.

[Link to Data Sources and Methods](#)