

# FITNESSGRAM<sup>®</sup> Administration: Tips for educators

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**The Presidential Youth Fitness Program – the new national assessment of youth fitness – promotes healthy lifestyles, empowers students and parents, and supports quality physical education. AAHPERD is proud to be leading the professional development component of this program.**

The first national youth fitness evaluation conducted in the United States was in 1958. Since that time, schools have continued to administer fitness evaluations using a variety of tests with no national-level assessment of youth fitness [Institute of Medicine (IOM), 2012]. However, in September 2012, the Presidential Youth Fitness Program (PYFP) was announced by the President's Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition (PCFSN), Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD), The Cooper Institute, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The PYFP is a comprehensive program based on health-related fitness which will replace the former Physical Fitness Test for youth. The PYFP has adopted FITNESSGRAM<sup>®</sup> as the program's national student fitness assessment. The efforts provided by the supporting organizations to adopt a single national-level youth fitness assessment has great potential for large-scale evaluation that can assess health trends in youth.

Consequently, physical educators will likely be the ones who collect the youth fitness scores. It will be important for physical educators to collect and record reliable data if any significant meaning will be derived from the scores. Collecting reliable scores can be challenging when considering the issues many physical educators face. According to the 2012 Shape of the Nation report, only three states require the nationally-recommended 150+ minutes per week at the elementary level and the 225+ minutes per week at the secondary level. Further, many physical educators report lack of space and/or overcrowded



classes as issues that continue to surface. The purpose of this article is to provide physical educators with practical tips for efficient administration of the FITNESSGRAM<sup>®</sup> tests while collecting accurate fitness scores.

### **Planning for FITNESSGRAM<sup>®</sup> Tests**

Perhaps the most important factor in managing fitness evaluation is preparedness. There are many aspects to consider before testing day. The teacher and students should know the FITNESSGRAM<sup>®</sup> testing protocols and designated healthy fitness zones (HFZs) for each test that will be administered. Resources (e.g., videos, free online course, administration manual, HFZ charts, etc.) are available through the PYFP website ([www.presidentialyouthfitnessprogram.org/](http://www.presidentialyouthfitnessprogram.org/)) for teachers to use and distribute. Teachers should also invest in the fitness equipment, suitable audio system, and cadence tracks used for the FITNESSGRAM<sup>®</sup> tests.

Students should be prepared for each fitness component and testing protocol so they can complete the assessment safely (NASPE, 2009). Teachers should read and provide demonstrations of the proto-

cols and form breaks for each test. Further, teachers can have students practice the tests during a warm-up, intersperse practice opportunities throughout lessons/units, and encourage the students to practice outside of school.

Lastly, teachers should plan to group students by ability before testing. This will ensure that students will complete the test at approximately the same time. When students with varying abilities are tested at the same time, students who finish first sit and wait while other students complete the test. This limits participation and can result in unwanted behavioral issues.

### **Administering FITNESSGRAM<sup>®</sup> Tests**

Fitness testing stations are an effective way to collect fitness scores. This may look very different for each school. For example, if there is only one physical educator at the school, he/she may have certain stations where the students are engaged in previously learned skills/strategies of a particular game (e.g., soccer), while having another station dedicated for fitness testing. This model of testing may take many days to complete, but the teacher can be confident in recording reliable fitness scores for a few students at a time. The fitness assessments should also be strategically chosen to maximize time. For instance, the 90° push-up test and the curl-up test both require an audio system with use of a cadence and could easily be administered on the same day.

When there are multiple physical educators within a school, testing stations can be effectively managed as well. In this model it is important to have an audio system loud enough to be heard by all students

**Figure 1. Tips for Individual FITNESSGRAM® Test Items**

Test Item	Tips	Modifications for Students who are Disabled or Overweight
PACER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly mark lanes.</li> <li>Have students assist in the evaluation by using score sheets provided in the FITNESSGRAM® Test Administration Manual.</li> <li>Laminate the score sheets and have the students use dry erase markers for easy reuse.</li> </ul>	Have students use outside lanes for safety.
Mile run	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Give students a popsicle stick after each lap to ensure they complete the proper number of laps.</li> </ul>	Have students reach a goal of number of laps with a peer.
Body Mass Index	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruit the school nurse to complete the BMI reading.</li> <li>Have students stand backwards on the scale to ensure privacy and do not verbalize weight.</li> <li>Conduct back-saver sit and reach immediately after this test as shoes are removed for both exercises.</li> </ul>	If the student is too heavy for the scale, request a reading from a physician.
Curl-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher positioning is important to see all common errors (e.g., heels come up of the floor, head does not return to mat, or fingertips do not touch edge of measuring strip).</li> <li>Use a yoga mat with double-sided velcro at the appropriate measurement for easy set up.</li> </ul>	Complete an alternate form of abdominal strength (i.e., standing knee lifts), and periodically repeat the same test to measure for student improvement.
90° Push-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher positioning is important to see all common errors (e.g., 90° angle is not accomplished, back is not flat, or knees touch floor).</li> <li>Place an appropriate size foam ball under the chest to teach students where the 90° angle occurs.</li> </ul>	Complete an alternate form of upper-body strength (i.e., wall push-ups), and periodically repeat the same test to measure student improvement.
Back-saver sit and reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use multiple boxes to increase efficiency of time.</li> <li>Make a modified box out of a milk crate, yard stick, and duct tape.</li> </ul>	Complete an alternate form of flexibility (i.e., two leg sit and reach), and periodically repeat the same test to measure for student improvement.

at multiple stations, or multiple audio systems that can be heard only by the students at each station. If using one audio system, each teacher will be responsible for having his/her students quietly ready to begin the specific test at the station. One teacher can take the lead to make sure all students are ready for testing. This can be done by a simple hand gesture or signal to all other teachers. Teachers should be in position to view all form breaks, stop the student after he/she has had two form breaks, and record the scores. Physical educators collaborating in this model can drastically decrease the amount of time to complete fitness testing.

It is imperative that teachers are only testing the amount of students they can accurately monitor without compromising the integrity of the test.

Physical educators may also decide to recruit and train “data collectors” to assist with the FITNESSGRAM® administration. Data collectors could be retired teachers, paraprofessionals, graduate students,

school nurses, etc. Training data collectors consists of teaching the testing protocols and accurately spotting form breaks. The training is essential in order to ensure accuracy of fitness scores. This model allows for multiple fitness stations to occur on the same day. In turn, the time used for fitness testing significantly decreases. However, caution should be used as students may overexert themselves on a particular test (e.g., PACER) and perform poorly on another that same day.

### Conclusion

Fitness assessment is an integral part in the ongoing process of helping students understand, enjoy, improve and/or maintain their physical fitness and well-being (NASPE, 2004). Teachers should make every effort to create testing situations that are private, non-threatening, educational and encouraging. In doing so, students, parents, teachers, and administrators will be able to make meaningful decisions that can impact

students’ health in a positive manner. Collecting reliable fitness scores from a single national-level youth fitness assessment can be recognized as a critical step toward legitimizing the importance of fitness testing in schools.

### References

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