California's childhood obesity rates remain dangerously high despite a slight drop in recent years, threatening the long-term health of children throughout the state, according to a study released Wednesday. Thirty-eight percent of children statewide were obese or overweight last year, a 1.1% decline from five years earlier. The rates in Los Angeles County dropped by 2.5% to about 42% last year. "Any decline is good," said Dr. Jonathan Fielding, director of Los Angeles County's Department of Public Health. "Despite that, we still have a terrible epidemic … with profound implications for young people."

The modest improvement shows that California may be turning the corner in attacking childhood obesity, a problem that is having a tremendous impact on the state's physical and financial health, according to the report by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and the California Center for Public Health Advocacy. California spends more than $21 billion in public and private money on healthcare and other costs because of obesity, which increases the risk of diabetes, high blood pressure and other diseases, the authors said. "This study provides a little bit of encouraging news," said Susan Babey, a UCLA researcher and lead author of the study. "But there are a lot of areas in the state that didn't see improvement."

Nationally, obesity rates were four times higher among children 6 to 11 years old, and three times higher among those ages 12 to 19, than they were three decades ago. The data — based on physical fitness tests of students in fifth, seventh and ninth grades — showed stark differences among counties. More than half of the counties saw their obesity rates climb between 2005 and 2010. Imperial County had the highest obesity rate at 47% and Marin County had the lowest at 25%. The biggest increase — 16% — occurred in Del Norte County.

Since 2004, California has taken several steps to promote healthy food and exercise, including requiring nutrition labeling on certain restaurant menus and banning soda and junk food from public schools. Those changes are having an impact, said Marion Standish, director of the community health program at the California Endowment. "All of these efforts have really taken root and shown that we can change the course of the health of California overall," she said. Standish said she remains concerned about the areas where rates continue to climb. California Endowment and other organizations throughout the state continue working to raise awareness and make healthier food more available in those areas, she said. Los Angeles County also has made childhood obesity a priority and recently received a $10-million grant to work on the issue. Fielding said some of the money is going toward physical education training for teachers and on getting schools and preschools to provide more fresh fruits and vegetables. The county also is working on developing policies to make streets more pedestrian-friendly so children can get more exercise, he said. "There is no panacea here," Fielding said. "We have to work on both the physical environment and the nutritional environment."

The work in Los Angeles, especially in the schools, has made the county one of the leaders in the state in curbing childhood obesity, said author Harold Goldstein, executive director of the California Center for Public Health Advocacy. But Goldstein said there is much more to be done. "The rates are still astounding," he said. "We have a long way to go before we can declare victory."

So, why is there physical education homework at David A Brown Middle School? We want students and parents alike to appreciate and benefit from involvement in physical activity and its contributions to a healthful lifestyle. We want to keep today’s students from becoming sedentary, less healthy adults by developing a pattern and habit of exercise in their own lives outside of the school physical education program. Also, given the scope of the curriculum and limited time in class, it is impossible, to do all that is needed to complete a well rounded fitness programs, therefore, the student must develop fitness habits out side the “classroom”. Each month the homework will consist of activities in the areas of cardiovascular endurance, flexibility, and strength along with information/quizzes in the areas of nutrition and other health issues. A parent signature for each assignment will verify that the required activities were completed by the students.
CIRCLE THE ANSWER TO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. What percentage of children were overweight last year state wide?

   a. 25%  
   b. 42%  
   c. 38%  
   d. 30%

2. California spends how much money per year on healthcare because of obesity?

   a. 42 billion  
   b. 21 billion  
   c. 16 billion  
   d. 19 billion

3. Obesity increases the risk of which disease?

   a. diabetes  
   b. high blood pressure  
   c. anorexia  
   d. both a and b

4. Nationally, obesity rates were how much higher among children 6 to 11 years old?

   a. 3 times  
   b. 2 times  
   c. 5 times  
   d. 4 times

5. California has banned what items from public schools to help fight obesity?

   a. soda  
   b. junk food  
   c. hugging  
   d. both a and b

6. Mr. Goldstein works for which agency?

   a. California Endowment Agency  
   b. UCLA  
   c. Los Angeles County Department of Public Health  
   d. California Center for Public Health Agency

Directions: Write a T if the statement is true and an F if the statement is false.

7. Imperial County had the lowest obesity rate at 47%.

8. The smallest increase in obesity rates occurred in Del Norte County.

9. Los Angeles County has made fighting childhood obesity a priority and recently received a $10-million grant to work on the issue.