

REGION: Most students miss state physical education goals

By STACY BRANDT sbrandt@nctimes.com | Posted: Wednesday, November 30, 2011 5:00 pm

The number of students across the state who met all physical fitness goals dropped last year, after several years of increases, according to data released Wednesday.

Most students in North County continued to beat the state and countywide averages, as they have in the past, but the number of local students meeting expectations also dropped.

Across the state, about 31 percent of students passed the tests for all six fitness areas, data from the California Department of Education shows.

"When only 31 percent of children are physically fit, that's a public health challenge we can't wait to address," state Superintendent Tom Torlakson said Wednesday at a press conference in San Diego.

The fitness tests are given each year to public school students in fifth, seventh and ninth grades. The results released Wednesday were for the 2010-11 school year.

In the region, only Escondido Union, Oceanside Unified, Vallejos and Vista Unified were below the state average for the number of students passing all of the tests.

Countywide, about 36 percent of students met the goals, down from 38 percent the year before.

The North County districts with the highest percentage of kids passing the tests were those in wealthier areas, including Carlsbad Unified, Poway Unified and San Dieguito Union High where more than half of the students tested hit all of the targets.

The tests ---- which include exercises such as modified push-ups and sit-ups ---- assess aerobic capability, body composition, strength, flexibility and endurance.

In order to pass, a 15-year-old boy needs to do at least 16 push-ups, 24 sit-ups and be able to run a mile within 9 minutes, among other things. For girls and younger students, the goals are lower.

Schools started administering physical fitness tests in 1976. They are now required by state law.

Statewide, nearly 12,000 of the 1.3 million students missed all six targets, according to the data. In San Diego County, 841 out of more than 100,000 students failed all of the tests.

Over the last several years, schools have worked to offer healthier lunches and get rid of sugary snacks to help fight a growing obesity problem among children across the country.

At Wednesday's press conference, Torlakson urged schools to participate in the Team California for Healthy Kids campaign, which he started in October to promote healthy eating and physical activity for children.

More detailed test results for individual districts and schools is available online at www.cde.ca.gov.