



## Does Your School District Have a SHAC?

By Carey Dabney, Texas PTA Healthy Lifestyles

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Parent and community involvement in schools has always been a priority for PTA and it is even more important today that we reach out to recruit parent and community leaders to support public schools that are working hard to create healthier school environments.

It is a fact that a properly nourished child performs better in school—both academically and behaviorally; that physical activity strengthens a child's body, mind, and self-esteem; that healthy habits are best formed during childhood; and that it is less expensive to raise a healthy child than to fix an unhealthy adult.

In 2001, Texas PTA was part of a coalition led by the Texas Medical Association to support passage of Senate Bill 19 which made it mandatory for school districts to have a School Health Advisory Council (SHAC). By law a SHAC must be made up of a majority of parents who have children in the district, but are not employed by the district. A SHAC is advisory in nature and makes recommendations to the district on coordinated school health programming and its impact on student health and learning. Texas requires each school district to implement a coordinated school health program that provides for coordinating:

- (1) health education;
- (2) physical education and physical activity;
- (3) nutrition services; and
- (4) parental involvement.

To increase parental involvement and school accountability, recent legislation (Senate Bill 283 and Senate Bill 892) requires a SHAC to have a minimum of five members with a parent or co-parent as chair; to meet at least 4 times a year, report directly to the school board annually, and to recommend indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of Coordinated School Health Programs. At the elementary and middle school levels an evaluation of coordinated school health programs must be in the Campus Improvement Plan.

To find out if your school district has a SHAC, who is in charge and how you can be involved, contact your school district's administrative office and schedule a time to meet with the staff person that has oversight for the SHAC. Invite the district staff person along with the school board trustees to a round table discussion to inform parents and community members about the role of the SHAC and to get input from the school community.

To download the *SHAC Guide for School Districts* and to contact the School Health Specialist at your Regional Education Service Center for SHAC training go to: <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/schoolhealth/sdhac.shtm> .

For the power point *Parent Involvement and SHAC* go to: <http://icohere-presentations.com/Presentations/NDC2009/HKHSSummit09/CareyDabney/player.html>.

To learn about the Texas Education Agency *The Year of the SHAC* webinar series beginning in September go to: <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/schoolhealth/netlist.shtm>.

And stay in touch with Texas PTA through our legislative action list and online newsletter *The Voice* because practicing healthy habits is everyone's responsibility. Schools alone cannot, nor should they be expected to teach healthy habits without the support of families and communities. It is up to all of us to work together to create healthier home, school, work and community environments where health is taught, valued and supported.