

Physical fitness of S. Korea's students steadily worsening: report

SEOUL, Oct. 14 (Yonhap) -- The physical fitness of South Korean elementary, middle and high school students has worsened in recent years, with high school seniors showing the most serious decline apparently due to stress from harsh academic competition, a report showed Wednesday.

Those in the top two fitness levels accounted for 33 percent of all students last year, down 8 percent from 2000. Those in the lowest two levels increased by 11 percent to 42 percent during the same period, according the parliamentary fitness report.

The fitness tests are conducted annually at schools, categorizing students in levels from 1 (very good) to 5 (very poor) based on their performances. The tests include a 50-meter race, push-ups, sit-ups, standing long jump and a long-distance race. Last year's results showed scores falling across the board, the report said.

The average height of students, however, has grown by 2-3cm compared with ten years ago, it showed.

The education ministry cited increased consumption of Western foods and a lack of physical activity as the main reasons for weakening fitness. Earlier this year, it strengthened its fitness program to help students with poor physical health stay in better shape.

"We expect that the management concept we introduced this year to the student health and fitness evaluation will help improve students' physical condition, beginning in primary school."

ejkim@yna.co.kr

(END)

