

October 16, 2020



Attn: Miguel del Valle
President
Chicago Board of Education
1 N. Dearborn Street #950
Chicago, IL 60602

Re: New Local School Wellness Policy for Students

Dear President del Valle:

I am writing on behalf of the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity (IAPO), a multi-sector 140-organizational member statewide coalition focused on physical activity and nutrition. We write to commend the Chicago Board of Education on the updates you have made to strengthen the Local Wellness Policy for Students and to express support for these changes and to make a few additional recommendations.

IAPO is led by the Illinois Public Health Institute to promote more equitable and just opportunities for Illinoisans to eat healthy and be physically active to optimize their health and well-being. Formed in 2010, IAPO advances policies, systems and environmental-level changes to better support the health and wellness of Illinois communities. IAPO has a long history working to promote physical activity, physical education, and nutrition in schools through policy and systems change at the state and local level and professional development for school teachers and administrators.

We want to highlight some of the updates you have made that align with evidence-based approaches shown to have a positive impact on student health and wellness, and address health equity considerations:

- A specific equity statement acknowledging the existence of inequities in consistent access to physical activity and nutrition across Chicago Public Schools, and the impact on students experiencing these inequities.
- More language explaining the rationale behind stronger nutrition and physical activity policies – the connection between academic achievement and student health and wellness.
- Improvements to the food environment such as nutrition standards for “competitive foods” (foods and beverages for sale on the school campus) and limiting the presence of snack vending machines in elementary schools. Many students consume more than half of their daily calories at school, so healthy school meals can make profound impacts on child health.¹
- Prohibiting the sale of soft drinks and beverages with added sweeteners, and actively prompting water consumption throughout the school day. Sugary drinks are the #1 source of added sugar (51%) in the American diet and research links their consumption to increased risk for obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and other chronic conditions.²
- Setting more specific goals/metrics on the amount of physical activity that will be provided to students, with an emphasis on providing physical activity for all students. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), regular physical activity reduces kids’ risk of developing chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer and type 2 diabetes.³ There is also a well-established connection between physical activity and improved health, behavioral and academic achievement among children.⁴

Convened by

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- Putting more of an emphasis on employee wellness. Fostering school employees' physical and mental health protects school staff, and by doing so, helps to support students' health and academic success. School staff can also play an important role in modeling health behaviors.

However, while many of the changes are positive, we'd like for you to consider the following recommendations:

- The previous wellness policy mentioned the importance of promoting active transportation, like walking or biking, to school. We'd highly recommend that same encouragement be provided in the new policy.
- We'd highly recommend the district continue to invest and increase investment into the Office of Student Health & Wellness to develop implementation guidelines and resources for schools to fully implement the wellness policy at the school-building level.
- We recommend that the annual survey for wellness policy practices be REQUIRED by the district, rather than voluntary, to ensure full transparency about school-level differences, achievements and challenges.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity applauds and supports Chicago Public School's new Local School Wellness Policy for Students and highly encourages the consideration of the additional recommendations provided. Health-promoting schools make a big impact in supporting students in achieving optimal health and academic performance. We encourage CPS to monitor the implementation of this new Local School Wellness Policy and to regularly assess it to identify opportunities for further strength and improvement.

Sincerely,

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¹Briefel, R. R., Wilson, A., & Gleason, P. M. (2009). Consumption of low-nutrient, energy-dense foods and beverages at school, home, and other locations among school lunch participants and nonparticipants. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 109(2), S79-S90.

²Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2017) Physical Education. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/physical-education.htm> on March 17, 2019.

³Illinois Enhance P.E. Task Force (2013). Enhancing P.E. in Illinois: How investing in P.E. yields higher achievers. Retrieved December 2, 2013 from http://iphionline.org/pdf/IPHI_Enhanced_PE_Fact_Sheet.pdf.

⁴Illinois Department of Public Health (2007). Heart disease and stroke in Illinois: 2007-2012 state plan. Retrieved July 31, 2014 from http://www.idph.state.il.us/heartstroke/state_plan_book2.pdf.