

**The State Board of Education Chambers  
Public Meeting on Health and Wellness  
441 4<sup>th</sup> Street, NW**

**Health and Wellness  
March 16, 2011**

**Testimony of Alexandra Ashbrook, Director D.C. Hunger Solutions**

I am Alexandra Ashbrook, Director of D.C. Hunger Solutions. I appreciate this opportunity to testify regarding the exciting efforts to improve health and wellness for students through the D.C. Council's passage of the Healthy Schools Act in May of 2010.

The Act is a landmark legislation to improve health, wellness, and nutrition for District students—the most comprehensive school-based wellness legislation in the nation. It also tackles hunger, a significant problem in our city. And as the Act is rolled-out, it will position the District to become a national leader on health and wellness in schools as schools will:

- 1) Improve nutrition** by requiring healthier school meals – with more fruits, vegetables, and whole-grains –and healthier options for foods sold outside the cafeteria (such as in school stores and vending machines).
- 2) Expand access to school meals**, so that no child goes hungry, by providing free breakfast for all students, incorporating breakfast into the school day, and making lunch free for students who used to pay a reduced price.
- 3) Encourage Farm to School programs** to help students learn about and experience fresh, locally-grown foods in their classrooms and in their school meals.
- 4) Provide more physical activity opportunities** to help students get moving throughout the school day and develop lifelong healthy habits.
- 5) Provide more health education** to help students learn about nutrition, safety, and overall personal health.
- 6) Create greener schools** by encouraging school gardens, recycling programs, and energy-reduction initiatives, and testing for safe water/building materials.

In total, the Act provides approximately \$6 million in local funding annually to enable schools to comply with the requirements. It also allows the District to penalize schools that do not comply by withholding funds or levying fines.

D.C. Hunger Solutions, in partnership with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), Wellness and Nutrition Services; the Food and Nutrition Services Division of D.C. Public Schools, and public charter schools is working to implement the Act with a particular focus on the nutrition provisions of the Act. I have attached a brochure that overview the school meal requirements of the Act and applicable funding.

The following represent just a few of the highlights on how the Act is already making a difference:

- Breakfast participation is increasing thanks to free school breakfast served where student can access the most important meal of the day. In November 2010, 28,500 students ate free breakfast each day on average compared with 21,100 per day on average in November of 2009, an increase of 7,400 students or 35 percent.

The benefits of more students eating school breakfast go beyond helping improve student nutrition. Breakfast helps children learn, improves attendance, and reduces behavior problems and tardiness. Children who eat breakfast at school – closer to test-taking time – perform better on standardized tests than those who skip breakfast or eat breakfast at home.

- School meals are healthier with more whole grains, more fruit, and more vegetables.
- On March 14, 2011, D.C. Hunger Solutions partnered with OSSE and the D.C. Farm to School Network to host a full-day Healthy Schools Act workshop for more than 100 representatives from D.C. public and public charter school. At the event, Dr. Janey Thorton, USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services (FNCS), applauded the District's efforts to connect children to healthy food.

These are just a few examples of how implementation of the Act is improving school wellness. But, much work remains. Together—administrators, principals, teachers, parents, students, advocates, the State Board of Education, Councilmembers, volunteers, and others — can help implement and promote the Act in order to ensure that every student is healthy and ready to learn.

Respectful yours,

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