

April 18, 2016

President Jack Jacobson
State Board of Education
One Judiciary Square
441 4th Street, NW, Old Council Chambers
Washington, DC 20001

Dear President Jacobson:

On behalf of the staff and youth of the Young Women's Project (YWP), I am writing with my whole-hearted endorsement for the approval the DC State Learning Standards for Health Education. YWP is a DC-based, nonprofit organization that builds the leadership and power of young people so that they can shape DC policies and institutions to expand rights and opportunities. Since 1994, YWP has developed thousands of youth leaders and has worked in partnership with a number of DC agencies to develop policy and implement programs in sexual health education and services, foster care rights and opportunities, youth employment, and other issues. YWP programs cover a broad range of interventions -- from after school leadership programming to youth employment, peer education, youth-led research, and policy development.

YWP adult and youth staff have been honored to work along-side you, other SBOE members, and Executive Director John-Paul Hayworth on this important project during the past two years. We commend the State Board for taking on this bold revision, engaging youth as partners and stakeholders in the input and drafting, staying focused on the urgent needs of DC children and youth, and keeping the project moving forward through many twists and turns. I also want to acknowledge the work of many individuals who contributed many hours to this project. Thank you to DCPS Training and Learning Team (Heather Holaday, Erin Lumpkins, Miriam Kenyon), YWP staff members Aurora Munoz and Jessica Anderson for their drafting work. Thank you to the Youth Health Working Group members for all of their great research, recommendations, and testimonies over the past two years. And finally, thank you to OSSE Assistant Superintendent Donna Anthony and Superintendent Hanseul Kang and DME Policy Advisor Yair Inspektor for shepherding this important work through the final approval stages.

The DC Health Education Standards will create a foundation of knowledge, skills, and capacity for DC children and youth in a public school system where the vast majority of students have serious health challenges. These challenges are getting in the way of academic progress as is clearly documented in standardized test scores, truancy rates, and youth engagement. Data from the DC's Youth Behavioral Risk Survey (YRBS) makes a clear case for intervention and documents urgent health issues in several areas:

Nutrition: Lower-incomes and poverty correlate strongly with poor nutrition and higher rates of obesity; 32 percent of DC youth are obese or overweight. These same youth lack access to healthy foods and are dealing with hunger. Only 25 percent of high school students actually eat breakfast every day; 11 percent of middle school students and 17 percent of high school students report going hungry at least once within the past 30 days due to lack of food at home (YRBS Surveillance Report, 2013).

Physical Activity: Poor nutrition combined with a lack of physical activity is a bad combination. In DC, 71.9 percent of high school students were not physically active at least 60 minutes per day on 5 days or more. And 32.9 percent of female high school students and 21.9 percent of male high school students did not participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity on at least one day, within the past 7 days of the survey (CDC, 2014).