



New Haven Public Schools Healthy Kids Make Better Learners

**Testimony : School Health Coordinator Pilot
Susan Peters, APRN, MPH**

February 21, 2013

Good Evening, my name is Sue Peters, and on behalf of the NHPS district, I want to thank you for the opportunity to express why we feel continued funding for the School Health Coordinator pilot is so critical to sustaining and advancing the efforts in our district to make all students healthy, successful learners. The pilot program was originally slated to receive \$100,000 for this fiscal year; through rescissions, the amount has been reduced to \$95,000, and now is in jeopardy of being eliminated altogether for next year.

I'm the co-chair of our District Wellness Committee, and was a nurse practitioner in 2 of our school based health centers during the past 14 years. I currently work for Yale School of Public Health, and as a key partner with NHPS on a research grant, our work in 12 schools revealed the strong connection between health (physical and mental) and achievement outcomes of our students. It is well known that healthy kids make better learners, and in New Haven, about 50% of our students are obese/overweight, and there are severe other health disparities among our diverse students, and therefore, a wide "health gap". Since health and learning are so connected, we firmly believe that by closing the health gap, we can help to close the achievement gap, but for this to happen, we must coordinate and maximize existing resources and programs, and expand the coordinated school health model, now in 16 schools, to all our schools.

Because of our longstanding commitment to improving health of all students, our district is recognized as a model for its accomplishments such as, a #1 ranked school wellness plan in the State; healthier school food, including salad bars in all schools; school wellness teams in 16 schools; wrap-around services and community partnerships, such as BOOST! to provide more student support services; and 15 school based health centers, (though every school needs one). . .to name a few.

Though these are impressive, in a large urban district serving 20,000 students in 53 schools, and a growing obesity epidemic, health services/programs are severely underfunded, especially services such as school nurses and SBHCs, they are available in only some schools, and are not coordinated centrally for maximal impact. School health services, education and programs are not overseen or coordinated under one "department" in our district, unlike many other districts. This results in fragmented and siloed delivery of health resources with inconsistent coverage and impact across schools. School nursing, for example, falls under the health department, SBHCs are under BOE,

school wellness teams are supported through our district wellness committee, and different portions of health education topics are infused among different disciplines. We desperately need central coordination to connect these health services, providers, partners, and programs in a systematic and equitable way to identify and address challenges across schools and to obtain greatest reach and impact so that all students have the opportunity to benefit equally.

Because there has never been an individual or department that coordinates the various health related resources at the district level, and knowing how this current fragmented approach has hindered our ability to have maximal and equitable impact and sustainability across schools, we were excited to be selected as one of 2 districts to be awarded funding for exactly this position.

Unfortunately, hiring one now, when the program is proposed for elimination, is difficult, and given the deficit our district and city face, it is unlikely that this position will be funded locally for next year, especially without adequate time for a pilot (now less than 5 months) to provide justification for continued funding.

We ask for your consideration and support to keep this pilot as a line item for the next fiscal year to give our districts a chance to prove the value of such a position, and the impact it can have on making all schools healthier environments, reversing childhood obesity, closing both the health and achievement gaps, and becoming a successful model for the State and nation.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Susan Peters, APRN, MPH
Co-chair NHPS District Wellness Committee
Director, School Initiatives
CARE: Community Alliance for Research & Engagement
Yale School of Public Health