

Raised Bill No. 378

The intent of this letter is to respond to the section of **Raised Bill No. 378** regarding the recommendation that no Health be required for high school graduation.

I am a certified Health and Physical Education teacher at Hartford Public High School and see first hand, daily, what happens to adolescents who have not been taught Health throughout their time in school. Students have no education about proper nutrition, the consequences of substance use, healthy relationships, identity and sexuality, stress management, body image and self-esteem, and most obviously – sexual health. These are a majority of the topics that I teach throughout the semester long class (half-year). I am not able to provide the depth that the students need into these topics or teach other topics that are important as well. Half a year is not enough in the first place and now the recommendation is to cut health completely?! This makes no sense! We are already doing our youth a disservice by not requiring they get Health in elementary or at least middle school – cutting Health at the high school level would be devastating.

Nutrition : I spend about 3 weeks each semester teaching my students about proper nutrition. In a school that is 100% free and reduced lunch, you would hope that they would be making healthy choices since they are served food at the school, but this is not the case. Students do not fully understand the concept that eating fast food and junk food on a consistent basis, which they do, is bad for their health. A lot are under the assumption that because they exercise or play a sport that they can eat whatever and it won't hurt them. There is a consistent stream of chips, soda, candy, corner store food, fast food, pizza, Dunkin Donuts, etc. coming in and out of my classroom. No matter what time of day it is, this food is eaten with no concern for short- or long-term consequences. Many do not know that the label on foods only indicates the nutrients in one serving. They are not aware how to calculate calories or how to tell how much of their daily value they are consuming. Sadly, many do not even know the food groups or what foods belong in each group.

Substance Abuse : Addiction is another 3 – 4 weeks of a semester. More students than I can count grow up around drugs/alcohol whether it be walking by deals on the street, being asked to buy drugs, or it going on in their home. Some are born addicted and suffer setbacks their whole lives because of this. They don't know the effects, both short- and long-term of substance abuse. They believe that you can just stop using and be fine. Many are also not aware how gateway drugs can affect them or that Marijuana is in fact addictive. They are not learning this at home. Most students are lucky if their parents are home to spend time with them or if they even live with their parents. Most certainly do not have good role models and often get caught up in the negative influences.

Sexual Health : Hartford Public High School is participating in the Hartford Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative and as part of this Health teachers from all 3 academies are delivering the Be Proud, Be Responsible sexual health curriculum.

This is a 6 lesson module spanning over a length of about 2 weeks and delivers curriculum on HIV/AIDS, proper condom use, negotiation skills, and birth control. Students take a pre-curriculum and post-curriculum survey. Based on these surveys, we have learned that 44% of our population is sexually active. We have also learned that 23% of them have sex for the first time at age 14 or younger and 21% at age 15-17. We also learned that **only 63%** use condoms and 3% use both condoms and a form of birth control. It is scary to think that only 3% of our sexually active population is fully protected. Students don't know how to correctly use condoms and that puts them at risk of the condom breaking or not working appropriately. We also learned that 7% use withdrawal as a method – and don't understand that this is not an effective method and can still cause pregnancy.

If they are coming to us in high school with such little knowledge, it means that they are not getting this information at home. There is a desperate need for Health classes in high school and for students to be provided with a comprehensive health curriculum. Half a year of health is truly not even enough time to cover all the necessary material with fidelity. There is also very little positive adult influence for these students. They need to see that adults in their life can make good choices and that there are adults who care about them and their well-being. We need to be proactive in keeping kids from having kids, teaching about mental health, providing information on proper nutrition to prevent disease and obesity, and keep our youth from experimenting or becoming addicted to harmful substances!

I urge you to reconsider the recommendation to not require health for high school graduation. This will do our youth a huge disservice and in turn create problems for future generations.

With sincere intentions,

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