

# Our Vision for Healthy Students and Healthy Schools

Educators know that healthy students are better prepared to learn and succeed in school. Yet current health and education policy misses several simple, vital opportunities to boost academic success through health promotion and school wellness. The nation's children are struggling academically and could become the first generation to live shorter and less healthy lives than their parents.

The nation must leverage the power of school wellness to boost learning and take advantage of learning opportunities to foster healthy habits that will be of value for a lifetime.

We believe that prioritizing health in schools will yield lifelong benefits for the 52 million children currently in America's schools—and that our nation's future hinges on giving all children a chance for a healthy, brighter tomorrow.

Studies document what teachers, parents and education leaders know: healthy students are more likely to attend school, are better able to focus in class and are more ready to learn, ultimately earning better grades and achieving more in school.

A healthier school environment is one in which all students have access to health services. The school setting supports students' well-being and student health builds a foundation for learning. In this environment, good nutrition, physical activity, basic safety, clean air and water, access to care, and education about making healthy choices allow students to thrive. In a healthy school, students learn—through lessons and through example—to value their own health and that of the environment.

Achieving this vision will require:

- **Providing safe and healthy places to learn and play.** All students deserve access to a clean and safe environment with good air quality. Schools should provide students with nutritious meals and opportunities for physical activity—including effective PE classes and recess—while eliminating unhealthy foods and teaching students about the importance of nutrition and activity.
- **Recognizing health as an integral part of excellence in education.** We must integrate health and wellness into the definition of a successful school and recognize the

ways in which these elements support learning.

As we evaluate school performance and seek to elevate successful practices, we must acknowledge the role that health and wellness play in student achievement.

- **Closing the achievement gap, eliminating health disparities.** Research shows that higher levels of achievement are often related to health—and that health problems are closely connected to hindered performance in school. Until we address the health disparities that many low-income minority students face, learning disparities will persist.
- **Providing teachers, principals and school staff with knowledge and skills to create a healthy school environment.** School personnel need information and support for proven, cost-effective strategies to improve the delivery of school health services, promote healthy and sustainable operations and implement healthy classroom practices.
- **Ensuring access to needed health services to students at school.** Access to health services is necessary to ensure students are healthy and ready to learn. Making health services available at schools is an efficient and cost-effective way to reach the 52 million children who spend their days at school. Research shows that access to care—from a school nurse, for example—improves wellness and academic achievement.
- **Connecting parents and community members with school-based health promotion efforts.** In order for these efforts to succeed, school leaders must engage parents and community members in understanding the connection between student health and achievement. Such efforts can build support for a healthy environment and ensure that families take full advantage of care available at school.

By following this vision, we can create a better future for our nation by improving student health and wellness, and ensuring students are healthy and ready to learn.

The following strategies can help this vision become reality.