

Testimony before the DC City Council on the Healthy Schools Bill
March 26, 2010
Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators (SHAPPE)
Cathy Reilly - Director

Thank you for this bill, we are in strong support of this effort to help our students and our schools embrace a healthier approach on many fronts. We are especially pleased to see the focus on nutrition and on the school based health centers. The school based health centers currently in operation have made a big difference in the high schools where they are operating. We are excited that three more are to be added and look forward to working with you on this and other aspects of this legislation.

Along with this support I am asking that you reconsider two elements of the bill:

Section 602 asks that the schools collect the body mass index, waist to hip ratio and estimated amount of physical activity in which students engage. This bill requires a yearly physical for each student. It would seem like a far better context to include these items on the physical. This would also be a moment where a health professional in a one to one context would be able to counsel a student on the meaning of these numbers. The high schools are not set up to do this for 11th and 12th graders without pulling them out of class. We now have one nurse for up to 1500 students. I would ask that this be re-considered.

Secondly I would ask that you reconsider the requirement for 80 hours of health per year in high school. We currently have a 1.5 credit requirement for health and physical education which might be roughly 180 hours combined. Typically students take a full year of PE and a half year of health. One Carnegie unit is about 120 hours. This bill adds essentially 340 hours of health or close to 3 additional credits.

It sets a poor precedent for this requirement to come through in Council legislation. It is not the appropriate way to amend the graduation requirements. I believe it is worth a debate in the context of what we ask our high school student to master prior to finishing high school but not as a stand alone without looking at what goes out when this comes in. You established a State Board of Education which you charged with setting these requirements. I would also ask you to reconsider the use of hours to define the content. While you have alluded to the health standards, there are not health standards for the additional time that you are requiring.

In closing this is an important act with many different aspects. It is really important that the Council get it right so that it can be implemented with the necessary funding and community support. It could have easily been a number of different bills, let the strong elements go forward and leave things like going into the high school course requirements to the Board you have created to wrestle with those issues.