



Councilmember Mary Cheh
Committee on Government Operations
and the Environment, Chair
1350 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Suite 108
Washington, DC 20004

March 26, 2010

Dear Councilmember Cheh,

Thank you for this opportunity to offer my support for the Healthy Schools Act of 2009. I share your commitment to health and nutrition for our young people and am enthusiastic about the progress we are making in our school communities. As you know, we have already begun to implement many of the provisions of the original piece of legislation you introduced and I remain committed to working with you and the rest of the Council as we move forward to expand the ways we engage DCPS students around healthy food, physical activities and healthy lifestyle choices.

This legislation addresses a broad array of issues that impact student life. To date, the DCPS team has worked closely with you and your staff on many of the food service provisions and we look forward to continuing this work on the remainder of the bill, especially the provisions around physical education and activity. I agree that sixty minutes physical activity/day is an excellent goal for schools to promote and consistent with the recommendations of the CDC, most of that activity should be in physical education classes. Moving forward, we will work with your staff to best align the physical education targets with school schedules at the different grade levels. We also support a robust health education for our students but in order to meet the requirements of the bill in both the health and activity sections, significant funding would be required to support staff and an extended school day.

I do remain cautious about the fiscal implications of the legislation. While we have worked with the OCFO's Office of Revenue Analysis and your office to provide information on current expenditures and some expected cost increases associated with the bill, work remains to fully cost out some of the requirements associated with increased physical and health education requirements. More importantly, a new funding stream must be identified to support the legislation and to ensure that existing budgets which are already stressed for DCPS and other District agencies are not reduced. Additionally, I want to clarify that we think a "central kitchen" facility is a great idea for helping bring more locally grown food to schools and intend to include it in our long-term plans. However, it is not contemplated in the facilities master plan or Capital Improvement Plan for public schools and due to the current economic climate, a capital project of this magnitude would require a realignment of existing priorities relative to school buildings.

We are excited about the many innovative ways we can help our students lead healthier and more active lives. Since you introduced this legislation on January 8th, my team has worked together with your staff and our sister agencies to carefully review each provision and to offer specific feedback. I commit to this same level of engagement as we move on after today's hearing. Where it may be important to have formal policy or regulations governing topics related to student health and wellness, we also welcome to opportunity to continue to work with stakeholders and Council.

Sincerely,



Michelle Rhee