



March 25, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

Trust for America's Health (TFAH), a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority, thanks the Committee on Education and Labor for the opportunity to provide input regarding reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

As you reform this legislation, we urge you to seize this opportunity to not only improve our education system, but also to promote the health of America's children, adolescents, and young adults. More than 23 million children and adolescents in the U.S. are obese or overweight. Schools must play a major and ongoing role in helping to mitigate and ultimately reverse this epidemic. Schools can serve as venues to promote healthy lifestyles by providing access to physical activity and nutritious foods, offering quality physical education, and educating students as well as parents about the importance of healthy eating and physical activity. In addition, there is a growing body of evidence linking physical activity to improvements in academic performance and decreasing adolescent risk behaviors. Therefore, federal policies that encourage physical activity via recess and physical education (PE) class can also help students meet educational goals.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) 2006 School Health Policies and Programs Study (SHPPS), a national survey to assess school health policies and programs, found that only 3.8 percent of elementary schools, 7.9 percent of middle schools, and 2.1 percent of high schools provided daily physical education or its equivalent for the entire school year for students in all grades in the school. It also found that only 67.8 percent of elementary schools provided daily recess for students in all grades in the school. This is a major missed opportunity for getting kids on the right path towards healthy, active lifestyles.

To address these gaps, TFAH urges you to prioritize physical activity and physical education as you reauthorize ESEA. Some suggestions for accomplishing this include: implementing the reforms included in the Fitness Integrated with Teaching Kids Act (HR 1585); providing adequate financial resources to support quality PE and health; enhancing PE teacher training; expanding the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program and specifying nutrition and physical activity as allowable uses of funding; and authorizing programs to improve health and safety, such as the Administration's proposed Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students program, which would award grants to improve school safety and to promote students' physical and mental health and well-being, nutrition education, healthy eating, and physical fitness.

TFAH thanks you again for the opportunity to comment on ESEA reauthorization and hopes to engage with you on this issue in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey Levi".

Jeffrey Levi, PhD  
Executive Director  
Trust for America's Health