



Annual Report to the Mayor and the Council of the District of Columbia

January 31, 2017

Introduction

Pursuant to the D.C. Healthy Schools Act (the Act), the Healthy Youth and Schools Commission (the Commission) is charged with advising the Mayor and the Council of the District of Columbia on health, wellness and nutrition issues concerning youth and schools in the District. As required by the Act, the Commission is pleased to submit to the Mayor and the Council its Annual Report on the implementation of the Act in School Year (SY) 2015-2016.

The Commission began the year intent on assessing the most effective aspects of the Act, as well as identifying areas of improvement. To that end, the release in February 2016 of “The Healthy Schools Act of 2010: Building Healthy School Environments,” a qualitative and quantitative review of the Act’s first five years prepared by American University, provided substantive data for the Commission to consider:

- In the five years since the Healthy Schools Act was implemented, food served in schools is healthier, fresher, and more local.
- Environmental literacy among students is higher, and schools are much more “green” than they were in 2010.
- While there is a correlation between physical activity in school and improved math proficiency, most schools are not meeting the required minutes of physical activity prescribed in the Act, despite some gains made since the Act was passed.
- The positive effects of the Act, and its areas of weaknesses, play out consistently across the city, suggesting that student demographics are not a significant factor in the implementation of the Act at a school level.

The Commission spent considerable time in 2016 reviewing specific parts of the Act the Commission felt needed revision, as well as its role in the process of updating the Act. The Commission also looked introspectively at its relationship and working relationship with OSSE. These two issues comprise the bulk of this report.

The Commission believes the “District of Columbia Healthy Schools Act of 2010 2016 Reports” submitted to the Council by the State Superintendent of Education in 2016 accurately reflects the programs and services delivered under the Act in School Year 2015-2016. Therefore, this report does not duplicate the data and analyses presented by the State Superintendent.

The Commission looks forward to continuing to work with the Mayor and members of the Council to make schools and youth in DC among the healthiest in the nation.

I. Parts of the Act that the Commission Believes Need to be Reviewed

Over several meetings, the Commission reviewed data provided by OSSE, as well as heard comments from a wide range of stakeholders about which parts of the Act were working most effectively, which parts have room for improvement, and what aspects of a child's well-being are missing from the Act. To that end, the Commission identified several areas in which it believes the Council should focus in 2017:

1. Physical Activity and Education

Per OSSE school-level data and the American University report on the Act, the vast majority of schools in DC are not in compliance with the requirements of the Act. The Commission recognizes there are many ways to address this challenge, including reducing the requirement, offering greater flexibility about the kinds of activities that qualify to meet the requirement, and providing additional resources to enhance programming and/or hire additional staff. The Commission believes a thoughtful conversation with stakeholders will contribute to solutions that make sense for schools, while maintaining the original intent of the Act.

2. Breakfast in the Classroom

The Commission fully recognizes the critical role that a healthy breakfast plays in a student's success at school. By making breakfast available to all DC students, the Act has made a tangible difference in the lives of DC's children, especially those from low-income classrooms. The Commission believes there should be additional flexibility on how schools deliver this service. With the wide range of school facilities, and broad diversity in terms of enrollment numbers, schools need the flexibility to offer breakfast in ways that best meets the needs of their students and staff.

3. Mental Health and Other Health-Related Issues Facing Students

The Act rightly prioritizes increasing physical health among DC students. The Commission believes that other aspects of a child's well-being, such as mental health, reproductive health, and school climate should at least be considered as the Act is fine-tuned in 2017. These issues need not be made the focus, but should be considered in terms of understanding the long-term well-being of students at various grade levels (preschool, elementary, middle, and high school.)

4. Central Processing Facility

One of the original provisions of the Act was for DCPS to examine the feasibility of opening a central processing and purchasing facility for schools across all sectors. While the intent of the legislation was sound, DCPS is but one potential user of such a facility. The Commission recommends that the Act be revised to require an independent evaluation of the feasibility of such a facility conducted by OSSE and shared with all stakeholders.

II. The Relationship Between the Commission and OSSE

With a full, effective staff at OSSE, the Commission met several times in 2016 to consider how best to interact and work with OSSE. (The Commission recognizes that other departments in the DC Government have responsibility for implementing parts of the Act; however, the bulk of the Act's resources are directed to OSSE.) The Commission reached the following conclusions:

1. The Commission's primary role is an oversight one and should be focused for the most part in assessing how effectively OSSE is implementing the Act. The Commission should ask questions, receive regular updates, request data, and offer substantive feedback to improve the implementation of the Act. The functioning envisioned by the Commission is akin to a staff/board relationship in a non-profit organization. Our job is to advise, make recommendations, and when necessary raise "red flags" and assist OSSE staff in addressing problems.
2. The Commission should receive regular financial updates from OSSE as well as be involved in a consultative manner in the development of budgets associated with the Act.
3. OSSE staff should participate in Commission meetings, but the meetings should be driven primarily by Commissioners, with additional input from interested community members.
4. Commission members should be "ambassadors" for the Act, promoting its success and ensuring that all schools are aware of resources available to them under the Act.
5. The Commission can play a role in the development and awarding of major grants under made available under the Act. The expertise of various Commission members can help strengthen the grant making process at OSSE.

III. Other Observations and Feedback

1. The Commission is very pleased with the leadership at OSSE and its commitment to deliver services related to the Act in an efficient and effective manner. Staff at OSSE appear to take seriously their role in implementing the Act with fidelity, while listening and responding to concerns at the school level. Its streamlining of the questions contained in the school health profile is one example of this responsiveness.
2. School leaders need to receive school-level data and technical assistance to address areas of weakness. The report from American University noted that much of the data schools provide to OSSE should be analyzed and returned to the schools with recommendations for improvement. Peer to peer support could also be a useful mechanism for such knowledge transfer.
3. The Commission believes that the competitive processes for distributing grants under the Act may put some schools, especially those in low-income areas, at a competitive disadvantage. Schools with grant writers on the staff, or very involved parent associations, may be able to write stronger grant applications than others.
4. OSSE needs greater flexibility in how it spends funds allotted to it by the Act. For example, OSSE is limited by the Act in its ability to spend “excess monies remaining” in the Healthy Schools until after the fiscal year ends. Since six years have passed since the Fund was first created, OSSE is able to predict to some extent what money will be left in the fund. A revised Act could create a mechanism for accessing some of those funds before the end of the fiscal year, perhaps in collaboration with the Commission.

APPENDIX A
Current Healthy Youth and Schools Commissioners

Name	Appointment	Affiliation
Donna Anthony	Designee representative of OSSE	OSSE
Cara Larson Biddle	Member Appointed by the Chairman of the Council	Children's National Medical Center
Lauren Biel	General member	DC Greens
Diana Bruce	Designee Representative of DCPS	DCPS
William Dietz	General Member	George Washington University
Rebecca Levin	Member appointed by the Chairperson of the Council Committee with oversight over education	Parent
Charneta Scott	Designee Representative of DBH	DBH
Jeff Travers	Chairperson	Cancer Support Community
Audrey Williams	Member appointed by DCPCSB	DCPCSB
Beverly Wheeler	General Member	DC Hunger Solutions
Open	Student Member	TBD
Open	Designee representative of DOH	DOH
Open	General Member	TBD