

Highlights of School Health Advisory Board Activities 2012 – 2013

The School Health Advisory Board has met six times since our last report to the School Board. The following are highlights from our discussions and activities.

- 1) Homework: The Board had numerous discussions about the stress many families experience due to homework including the health effects of sleep deprivation on teenagers.
- 2) Safe Schools Healthy Students: The Board heard ongoing reports from June Jenkins, program director, about the activities and programs implemented under this grant including data that shows the positive impact of these efforts. Ms. Jenkins will present the SSHS annual report to the School Board.
- 3) Concussion: Members of the Board met to evaluate the implementation of the concussion policy and plan pursuant to Senate Bill 652 of the 2010 General Assembly requiring the development of such a plan to identify and manage suspected concussions in student athletes. Based on our review, we updated the ACPS *Sports Concussion Management Plan*, re-published it on the school web page, and sent out a link to the plan to all contacts through Blackboard Connect. In addition, we made several paper copies for athletic trainers to share with local physicians.
- 4) Child Nutrition Program: Christina Pitsenberger, director of the Child Nutrition Program, is a member of the Health Advisory Board and regularly presents updates on efforts to improve the nutritional quality of offerings in the School Breakfast/Lunch Program. The CNS program continues to exceed federal nutritional standards, but this year the process has been very demanding and time-consuming. She would like to try new healthy and compelling recipes, but finds meeting the standards and balancing the available ingredients slows down her ability to be creative.
- 5) AEDs: The Board reviewed the AED program -- there are presently AED units in all of the high and middle school and two of the elementary schools.
- 6) School Nurses / Health Offices: Eileen Gomez, the school nurse coordinator, presented data on students diagnosed with various chronic conditions and clinic visit activity. Two-thousand three hundred and three students (2,303) have diagnoses of chronic conditions in school-year 2012-13. There continues to be increases in the numbers of students diagnosed with life-threatening food and sting allergies (271- a 12% increase from 2011-2012 and an increase of 73 % from 2008), autism spectrum disorders, seizures, diabetes as well as other chronic and acute conditions. Clinic visit data compiled annually reveals 167,010 individual visits for School Year 2011 – 2012 with an average of 927 student visits per day across the division. Please see attached documents.
- 7) Epinephrine Legislation: The board reviewed the implementation of the new epinephrine policy in accordance with new legislation (*Code of Virginia § 22.1 -274.2*). All schools now have epinephrine (Epi-pen auto-injectors) for use with a student believed to be experiencing a life-threatening allergic reaction.
- 8) Environmental Issues: The Board reviewed the annual report of ongoing monitoring by Lindsay Check Snoddy, Environmental Compliance Manager of the division's Environmental Management System, and discussed concerns regarding air quality due to vehicle emissions at the four school campuses located in the path of the proposed by-pass project.

Based on a request from our School Board Chair, the Health Advisory Board discussed the health risks of WiFi in our schools. The following points summarize our discussion.

Excerpts from the World Health Organization:

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs304/en/index.html>.

"The strength of RF fields is greatest at its source, and diminishes quickly with distance. Recent surveys have indicated that RF exposures from wireless technologies in publicly accessible areas (including schools and hospitals) are normally thousands of times below international standards.

In fact, due to their lower frequency, at similar RF exposure levels, the body absorbs up to five times more of the signal from FM radio and television than from base stations. This is because the frequencies used in FM radio (around 100 MHz) and in TV broadcasting (around 300 to 400 MHz) are lower than those employed in mobile telephony (900 MHz and 1800 MHz) Further, radio and television broadcast stations have been in operation for the past 50 or more years without any adverse health consequence being established."

The WHO concludes that considering the very low exposure levels and research results collected to date, there is no convincing scientific evidence that the weak RF signals from wireless networks cause adverse health effects.

- 9) Influenza Vaccination: Per a parent request, the board discussed the possibility/feasibility of offering influenza vaccination to students at school.
- 10) Head Lice: Eileen presented information on lice and feedback on the standard operating procedure that was developed in response to new recommendations from the AAP, NASN and CDC. The Board acknowledges that lice is an emotional issue for many people and is likely to cause distress no matter the management strategy. Although there is no evidence that parental notification letters help prevent the spread of lice and authorities do not recommend that schools send them, the standard operating procedure has left that decision up to individual school principals and nurses.

Recommendations to School Board

- 1) Homework: In response to increasing concerns over student and family stress related to homework, the desirability of encouraging extracurricular participation, as well as the acknowledgment of the deleterious effects of sleep deprivation on teenagersⁱ, and acknowledging research that shows diminishing returns on learning with increased homework volumeⁱⁱ, the Board recommends that ACPS consider the evidence-based recommendations of education academicians when assigning homework. It is further recommended that ACPS provide teacher training on methods of developing meaningful homework assignments driven by Division leadership (i.e. Matt etc.).
- 2) Safe Schools Healthy Students: The Board applauds the various endeavors in the implementation of this grant and supports to efforts to sustain the programs after the impending expiration of the grant.
- 3) Child Nutrition: The Board commends Christina's work and supports her continued efforts to improve the nutritional value of cafeteria offerings in compelling, kid-friendly ways. The Board also recommends and supports her continued efforts to incorporate locally grown foods into the menus.
- 4) AEDs: The Board recommends consideration of placement of AEDs in all of the elementary schools with priority to schools furthest from EMS. Cost: AED (\$1119 to \$2500), wall-mounted cabinets (\$165 - \$200), pads which have to be replaced every two years and after use (\$65), and batteries which need to be replaced every four years (\$164).
- 5) Concussion: The Board recommends continued support of the policy and plan, including annual education of parents, players and coaches, baseline and post-injury testing and cautious attention to gradual return to play for all athletes who experience concussion. We further recommend continued communication with physicians in the community to ensure a consistent approach. The Board recommends consideration of the *Headminder Concussion Resolution Index* (\$595 per campus) program for neurocognitive baseline and post-concussion testing as it is recommended by the medical expert on the Concussion Board for ease of use for both the athletic trainers on the sideline and the health care providers to whom they are referred.
<http://www.headminder.com/site/cr/home.html>
- 6) School Nurses: The Board recommends continued staffing of nurses and consideration of increasing them to full-time. We also recommend that the nurses be granted additional time for trainings and continuing education including encouragement to attend VDOE's annual School Nurse Institute in the summer.
- 7) Environmental Issues:

Western (29) Bypass: Due to concerns over the evidence of increased health risks to children and adults caused by vehicle emissions and the fact that thousands of children and a number of pregnant women will spend 6 to 10 hours a day for 180 days a year in close proximity to the proposed bypass, the Board recommends that the School Board requires/requests a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement that addresses these concerns with consideration of constructing the bypass further from the schools to at least 500 meters.

Wireless Technology: The School Health Advisory Board recommends that ACPS continue to follow the recommendations of the World Health Organization, the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection, the Federal Communications Commission, and the Food and Drug Administration for guidance and regulation regarding the use of communications technology on campuses.

From the FCC <http://www.fcc.gov/guides/wireless-devices-and-health-concerns> :

“Several US government agencies and international organizations work cooperatively to monitor research on the health effects of RF exposure. According to the FDA and the World Health Organization (WHO), among other organizations, to date, the weight of scientific evidence has not effectively linked exposure to radio frequency energy from mobile devices with any known health problems.”

- 29 Influenza Vaccination: Recognizing the potential for positive impact on student and staff attendance, while acknowledging the existence of barriers, the Board recommends that ACPS explore the possibility of offering flu shots to students.

ⁱ Sleep deprivation links to obesity in childhood: <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/obesity-prevention-source/obesity-causes/sleep-and-obesity/>

Sleep deprivation linked to increased athletic injuries in adolescents:

<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/news/Pages/Lack-of-Sleep-Tied-to-Teen-Sports-Injuries.aspx?nfstatus=401&nftoken=00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000&nfstatusdescription=ERROR%3a+No+local+token>

More sleep linked to improved child alertness and behavior:

<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/news/Pages/More-Sleep-Linked-to-Improved-Child-Alertness-Behavior.aspx?nfstatus=401&nftoken=00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000&nfstatusdescription=ERROR%3a+No+local+token>

ⁱⁱ **The Case For and Against Homework: Teachers should not abandon homework. Instead, they should improve its instructional quality.** Robert J. Marzano and Debra J. Pickering

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar07/vol164/num06/The-Case-For-and-Against-Homework.aspx>