

## School Health Advisory Board Report to School Board November 6, 2014

- 1) The composition of the health advisory board has changed with several new School Board appointees. (Please see the attached list).
- 2) **Homework and Student Stress:** This has been an ongoing discussion due to concerns about the mental health impact of excessive academic pressure on students as well as the myriad adverse mental and physical effects of sleep deprivation. Excessive homework at any grade level has the potential to be counterproductive at many levels, including impacting the creativity and critical thinking skills that ACPS seeks to foster in our students. The board recommends that school administrators be asked to make sure that assigned homework complies with ACPS's homework policy and consider requesting that subject & department teachers coordinate so they do not all assign big projects or tests at the same time. Further, homework policies at all grade levels need to be revisited, preferably with student and parent input.  
Currently, school counselors (with Mr. Haas) are planning a summer homework survey to determine how much time was spent, whether it followed school guidelines and whether it enhanced our students' education. There is a huge discrepancy between our high schools, with one high school assigning many hours of summer work and one requiring none. Of note, many of our AP and honors students have NO days without an assignment "hanging over their head" from the day they graduate middle school until high school graduation. We ask that this survey be done as soon as possible and be used determine the appropriateness of these assignments and whether they might be decreased or even eliminated in some subjects.
- 3) **Child Nutrition:** The board heard Christina Pitsenberger's proposed updates to the Wellness Policy and continues to support her efforts to exceed the requirements for healthy offerings set by the USDA. The board also approved her proposal to continue not offering beverages containing caffeine or artificial sweeteners despite the fact that the USDA permits such offerings at the high school level.
- 4) **School Nurses:** The school nurses remain busy, reporting 160,071 student clinic visits last year. The board recommends that consideration be given to increasing elementary school nurses' hours from 6 to 6.75 hours per day and allow time for meetings and trainings due to the increasing medical complexity of students in our schools. INSERT BOTH SETS OF NUMBERS.
- 5) **Doctors' Excusing Students from P.E.** In response to PE teachers' reports that PE excuses tend to be excessive and can be too open-ended, as well as their request that they be permitted to provide modified or alternative activity, the board recommended that the division develop a form to be sent to doctors containing start and end dates as well as the specific activity restricted. Eileen Gomez developed this form, which would be used only when there is a question about the initial excuse. The board also recommended that P.E. excuses by physical therapists be accepted. ATTACH FORM
- 6) **Food Allergies:** In response to recent parent requests for peanut-free schools or classes, the board revisited this issue. Please note that our recommendations are consistent with the food allergy guidelines for schools published by the [CDC](#).

The board advises that efforts be made keep children with food allergies safe, but that allergen-free policies are not recommended for the following reasons:

- a) Such policies are not readily enforceable, especially in larger schools.
- b) School personnel cannot assume parents/caregivers of non -food allergic children will be vigilant at reading labels or remembering which allergens to avoid.

- c) Since students have a variety of different food allergies, deciding which ones to ban would be difficult. Further, such bans may provide a false sense of security and lessen vigilance when the reality is that food allergic children and their caregivers should never assume food safety. Realistically, children with food allergies and their caregivers need to learn how to navigate a world of peanuts and other allergens.
- d) Finally, some children rely on nuts and nut butters as their major source of protein. The board does recommend that school employees, students and parents of classmates be aware of food allergies and take established precautions.
- 7) **Exertional Rhabdomyolysis:** This is a serious medical condition that occurs when there is massive breakdown of muscle fibers due to intense exercise (as well as crush injuries and other medical conditions). This leads to muscle weakness and swelling (which can lead to compartment syndrome requiring surgical treatment); and a substance released from the muscles can cause kidney damage. There are circumstances that increase the risk of developing this condition including overexertion of muscles that are not acclimated from a gradual build up, dehydration, and certain medications. Since a local case attributed to a high school athletic conditioning program was reported, the board recommended that athletic directors, trainers and coaches be made aware of this condition in order to prevent it and to recognize it early if it occurs, as early recognition and treatment can significantly improve outcome. NCAA guidelines on prevention and treatment were sent to all athletic directors and trainers, and we suggest that this information be shared at the annual mandatory meeting for all ACPS coaches held in August.

Basic fact sheet:

<http://www.ncaa.org/health-and-safety/medical-conditions/ten-factors-can-increase-risk-exertional-rhabdomyolysis>

NCAA Sports Medicine Handbook '13-14

pages 101-106 (includes fact sheet above):

<http://www.ncaapublications.com/productdownloads/MD13.pdf>

Article in the lay press that discusses ER and describes a multi-player episode:

<http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/sports/2013/03/09/illness-laid-low-6-athletes.html>

8)**Flu clinic.** Flu shots were offered in school to students at Baker Butler Elementary School as a convenience to parents. 15 out of 200 students participated. Organizers of this pilot clinic will need to evaluate whether the effort required to coordinate this clinic is warranted, given multiple other venues offering flu vaccines.

9)**Scoliosis Screening:** In accordance with Virginia law, ACPS provides information to parents of students in grades 5-10 to let them know that they should have scoliosis screening at their doctor's office. The SHAB will be discussing whether providing this screening at school (which is optional under the law) is practical.