

Chalkboard's K-12 Action Plan

#14: STUDENT HEALTH

Goal: *Ensure that Oregon students are healthy and prepared to learn.*

Recommendation: *If kids aren't healthy, they can't learn. Oregon Department of Education (ODE) should require that all school districts provide vigorous physical activity and comply with nutritional standards for school meals. The private sector should play a role in supporting after-school activities for kids. Healthy learners should be a statewide issue, where we coordinate the resources and efforts of the appropriate state agencies.*

Success Measurement: *Lower rates of obesity among public K-12 students. Rates of absenteeism due to illness should go down as well.*

Concept: *Schools have a stake in partnering with families to keep kids healthy. Health habits start young, so schools are a natural place to promote healthy living. Oregon does not have an adequate baseline measuring the health and well being of our school children, therefore, the state is not able to determine whether its actions are helping or hindering student health over time. The Governor should work with ODE and others to set tighter criteria for assessing the well being of all Oregon school children. School report cards should include the results so that parents and community members would know if students are more or less healthy over time. Because poor health is often associated with poverty, this process of assessing well being could also determine if some schools have a "health gap" that needs to be closed along with the achievement gap. Measures of well being might include days a student is out ill each year, student nutritional habits, physical stamina and whether there are signs of ongoing, untreated conditions (hearing loss, uncorrected eyesight) that might limit the student's participation and achievement. This monitoring could also help to determine how many students are capable of participating in extracurricular athletic activities of all types. Since extracurricular participation is an important way to keep students engaged in school, we can expect measures of student well being to be related to student achievement in the long run.*

Public Opinion: *The following concepts received a rating of 4.0 on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) on Chalkboard's Citizen Feedback Guide survey: "Consider adoption of school district policy to weigh and measure each student annually for the first five grades, meet Federal nutrition standards for food offered in every school, require daily physical activity K-12, and encourage innovative initiatives to reduce children's screen time and teach wellness and healthy living."*

Supportive Research: *Because physical education and athletics contribute to intellectual skill building and emotional well being, they are widely considered an important component of K-12 education. Key educational policy, such as the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (1994), addresses the ideal connection between students' physical health and their intellectual education. Ideally, "children will receive the nutrition, physical activity experiences, and health care needed to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies, and to maintain the mental alertness necessary to be prepared to learn."*

Increasingly, Americans look to schools to help reduce recent increases in chronic health problems like obesity, and to promote proper nutrition. Most research has relied on studies that identify the correlation between physical education and athletics in schools and other educational goals. Physical benefits of school athletics include locomotor and manipulative skill development in the primary grades, as well as positive self-concept and responsibility development in adolescence.

There are many purported social benefits of athletics, particularly in high schools. Researchers Hart, Gary, Duhamel and Homefield (2003) have found that interscholastic athletics may help to improve leadership skills (self-esteem, empowerment and time management) in middle-school girls. Broh (2002) suggests that student participation in athletics helps to boost social ties among students, parents and schools. Tellingly, high school dropout prevention programs use extracurricular activities, such as physical education, to promote student retention.

Chalkboard recommends tapping community resources to develop new opportunities for students to improve physical fitness and nutrition. The "Food Choices in Oregon Schools Task Force" will soon present its work to the State Board of Education. This group's recommendations could be a starting point for statewide collaboration.

*(Please visit the "Download Center" section of www.chalkboardproject.org to see source data: *Citizen Feedback Guide Survey Results*; and *ECONW Report: Condition of K-12 Education in Oregon*, pp. ii, 2-18 to 2-52; *Improving Quality & Strengthening Accountability in Oregon's Schools: Full Report*, Ch. 5, pp. 5-37 to 5-43, 5-48 to 5-49.)*