

# Researchers Analyze Impact of D.C. Healthy Schools Act

Newswise

(Newswise) — May marked the fourth anniversary of the District of Columbia's Healthy Schools Act (HSA), a law enacted to reduce obesity among students attending D.C. schools.

Researchers at American University have been analyzing the impact of the act on student academic achievement. A recent finding indicates that, among third, fourth and fifth graders, there is a correlation between the number of physical education minutes students receive and their scores on the D.C. Comprehensive Assessment System in both reading and mathematics. As physical education minutes increased, student scores also improved on the test.

This finding demonstrates that students' academic performance improves when there's a balance between time spent on physical education and time spent on learning, said researcher Stacey Snelling, Associate Dean of AU's School of Education, Teaching and Health.

"Health practitioners, school communities, and others should continue to have a dialogue on how best to, given time and resource constraints, balance minutes dedicated to physical education and classroom instruction," she said. "We can see that a healthy environment is related to academic success. Now, the question is, as a community, how can we help schools continue to build on recent successes?"

### Effective Implementation

The HSA was introduced in 2010 and increases student access to healthy meals, physical and health education, and physical activity. The D.C. Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE) oversees the implementation of the act by providing oversight, grant funding, professional development, and technical assistance to schools.

Each year, OSSE requires all schools to complete a School Health Profile, a questionnaire assessing compliance with the HSA. Data collected by OSSE indicates that the act is being effectively implemented:

99 percent of schools are meeting requirements for healthy vending and fundraising and all schools are providing healthier meals that meet federal and local guidelines;

Physical education, physical activity and health education have increased;

93 schools have active gardens;

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100 percent of schools serve locally grown and unprocessed foods to students; and 69 percent of schools have at least one certified or highly qualified health educator

Since the first year of the act's implementation, Kaiser Permanente has provided more than \$455,000 to AU to fund research and evaluation of the act and to assess its longitudinal impact.

"We're really pleased to see signs of correlation between healthy school environments and academic progress, and expect that over time, we'll see similar connections to health outcomes," said Celeste James, Director of Community Health Initiatives for Kaiser Permanente. "When schools and public and private organizations shape and examine policy together, we support better outcomes for our children across the board."

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