



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

PO Box 47990 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

February 18, 2009

The Honorable Rosemary McAuliffe, Chair
Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education
Washington State Senate
Post Office Box 40466
Olympia, Washington 98504-0466

Dear Senator McAuliffe:

I am writing as chair of the Washington State Board of Health to commend you for hearing SB 5973, which if passed, would begin to implement recommendations from the five studies on the academic achievement gap. The Board has long supported efforts to reduce the academic achievement gap, as education is a clear social determinant of health and the promotion of health equity and the reduction of health disparities is a longstanding goal of the Board.

Data from the Washington Healthy Youth Survey demonstrate that health risks are independently associated with academic risk, including overweight, lack of exercise, cigarette smoking, feeling unsafe at school, depression, soda pop consumption, and severe persistent asthma. Many of these health risks are more common among students of color than among their non-Hispanic white counterparts.

Similarly, a considerable body of research demonstrates that in the general population, lower levels of education are associated with unhealthy behaviors, reduced health literacy, lower rates of health insurance coverage, higher rates of diabetes, and higher rates of deaths from breast cancer, heart disease, stroke, and suicide. Addressing the persistent and disturbing gaps in educational attainment for students of color, therefore, has the potential to reduce racial/ethnic health disparities. The Board also staffs the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities, which is very interested in closing the academic achievement gap and has chosen education as one of five focus areas for its first action plan.

The Board is aware of the tough choices the Legislature faces in creating a state budget during these harsh economic times. Further, it understands that when the Governor and members of the Legislature are proposing to eliminate or suspend numerous boards, commissions, and councils that it might not make sense to create a new statutory advisory group. The weightiness of these policy decisions and the economic downturn, however, do not justify turning our backs and ignoring the unacceptable inequities in education and health faced by so many of the children in our state. We must find a way to keep the recommendations from the academic achievement gaps studies on the state's public policy agenda.

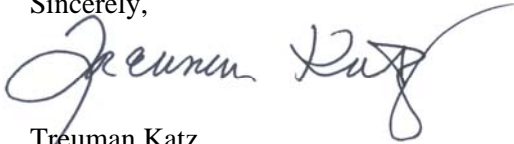
The Honorable Rosemary McAuliffe

February 18, 2009

Page 2

The Board is not in a position to advise you on whether to pass SB 5973, especially since it is not in the Governor's budget, but I wanted to take this opportunity to share the Board's policy perspectives on health disparities and the academic achievement gap and to thank you for considering this important public health issue. We honor you for your leadership and for taking on the burden of these hard decisions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Treuman Katz".

Treuman Katz
Chair

cc: Senate Committee on Early Learning and K-12 Education
The Honorable Claudia Kauffman, Washington State Senate
Washington State Board of Health Members
Ms. Vickie Ybarra, Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities
Ms. Judy Hartmann, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Ms. Christina Hulet, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Mr. John Aultman, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Mr. Brian Peyton, Department of Health
Mr. Craig McLaughlin, Washington State Board of Health