



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

PO Box 47990 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

March 19, 2009

The Honorable Dave Quall, Chair
Committee on Education
Washington State House of Representatives
Post Office Box 40600
Olympia, Washington 98504-0600

Dear Representative Quall:

I am writing as chair of the Washington State Board of Health to share the Board's policy perspectives on health disparities and the academic achievement gap and to provide some comments on SSSB 5973, which is scheduled for public hearing in the House Committee on Education on March 20.

There is ample evidence supporting the relationship between education and health. According to *Healthy People 2010*, "inequalities in income and education underlie many health disparities." Data from the *Health of Washington State 2007 Supplement* reveal that certain behavioral risk factors, such as smoking, are more common among Washington adults with less education than among adults with more education. Similarly, those with less education are less likely to have access to medical care and are more likely to suffer from injury and illness. Indeed, there is substantial evidence documenting higher mortality rates among people with lower levels of education compared to those with higher educational levels.

The reduction of health disparities is a longstanding goal of the Board and an important strategy for reducing disparities is to address the key social determinants of health, such as education. The Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities, which the Board staffs, has recently chosen education as one of its five priorities for its policy action plan to eliminate health disparities.

The Board strongly supports the recommendations from the academic achievement gap studies commissioned by the 2008 Legislature. Therefore, the Board supports in concept SSSB 5973, which would require the Professional Educator Standards Board to develop standards for cultural competency and would require the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to disaggregate student data in reports for specific racial/ethnic subgroups, to work with school districts with achievement gaps to advance cultural competence skills in the workforce and to work with the study research groups to develop a plan to implement their recommendations.

The Board can only support the bill in concept, since it is not in the Governor's budget. The Board also supports in concept SHB 2147, which would begin to implement two recommendations from the achievement gap studies and ESHB 2261, which would incorporate achievement gap recommendations into the state's basic education program.

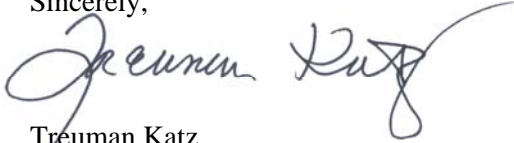
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The Board is aware of the tough choices the Legislature faces in creating a state budget during these harsh economic times and we honor you for your leadership and for considering this important public health issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Treuman Katz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and "K".

Treuman Katz
Chair

cc: Senate Committee on Early Learning and K-12 Education
House Committee on Education
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