

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
Washington, DC 20202

February 1, 2013

**Investing in Prevention Creates a Healthier, More Sustainable Future for Our
Nation's Children**

Dear Secretaries Sebelius and Duncan,

As national organizations committed to ensuring children have a healthy and successful future, we urge you to continue to support investments in the Prevention and Public Health Fund and further your collaborative efforts between the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED). Paving a path that allows the future generation of America to become healthy, productive citizens is not only the right thing to do; it is the smart thing to do. Promoting positive health outcomes are imperative for achieving academic success. As our nation works to address current economic challenges, investing in prevention is a common sense approach to improving health and reducing costs for families, schools and communities.

Evidence shows that improving health is inextricably linked to improved student learning. For example, preventable chronic health issues such as asthma, diabetes and obesity can lead to poor performance and increased absenteeism in school. Health risk behaviors such as physical inactivity and substance abuse can also lead to consistent underachievement, reflected in students' attendance, grades, and in-class behaviors. Promoting healthy lifestyle choices among students, such as integrating daily physical activity and providing access to healthy foods, strongly correlates to improved academic preparedness.

Today's children could be the first generation to live shorter, less healthy lives than their parents, but we can reverse this trend and bring health costs down at the same time by investing in transformative and cross-cutting prevention programs. The Prevention and Public Health Fund, established by the Affordable Care Act, moves this country from a focus on sickness and disease to one centered on prevention and wellness. Schools and health professionals, including school nurses, play a vital role in child and adolescent development by addressing the mental, physical and social health of students – creating a powerful outlet through which communities can join and engage in prevention efforts. In fiscal year 2012, the Prevention Fund allocated \$1 billion to critical public health programs across the country, supporting efforts in every state. Over the next 10 years, an additional \$12.5 billion will be invested in communities to implement proven, effective strategies to keep Americans – including the nation's children – healthier and more productive.

The Community Transformation Grant program (CTG), a major initiative of the Prevention Fund, provides additional opportunities for students to stay healthy and thrive in school. Aiming to create a healthier America by implementing sustainable, evidence- and practice-based strategies to prevent chronic diseases, this program has a strong focus on schools. In fact, K-12 schools are an integral partner in community transformations taking place across the country – 91 percent of CTG implementation awardees in year one are working in collaboration with K-12 schools. These schools are required to design interventions that address the leading causes of chronic disease, such as tobacco use, obesity, poor nutrition and health disparities.

Numerous examples across the country demonstrate the way in which CTG awardees are making a positive impact on the health of children in their communities. For example, South Carolina is offering healthy, active school environments to 542,000 students through active living initiatives across 64 school districts. New Mexico has taken a multi-faceted approach to improving school nutrition by ensuring healthy foods are available to

students. The state is working with school districts to limit school milk offerings to 1 percent and skim milk, making water readily accessible during the school day, selecting healthier options from the state's USDA school meals entitlement commodity program, purchasing locally grown foods through the Farm to School Program, and requiring healthy options for school snacks and school events.

These initiatives are significant because several research studies illustrate increased time in school-based physical activities leads to higher grades, improved standardized test scores and enhanced concentration in the classroom. Further evidence indicates an association between better diet quality and improved academic performance, citing diet factors such as consumption of fruits and vegetables versus salt, fat, and "empty calorie foods." Overweight and obese students are also more likely to exhibit poor performance in schools. Local school-based programs that help children make better choices and live healthier lives pave a path for a more sustainable future for all communities.

The facts could not be clearer: Prevention is the key to reducing health care costs and creating a long-term path to a healthier and economically sound America. We thank you for your leadership and collaborative efforts between HHS and ED, and urge you to continue strengthening this partnership, which is vital to ensuring that our nation's children have a healthy and successful future, free of chronic disease.

Sincerely,

American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance
American Association on Health and Disability
American Federation of Teachers
American Heart Association
American Music Therapy Association
American Physical Therapy Association
American Public Health Association
American Sleep Apnea Association
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Directors of Health Promotion and Education
Healthy Schools Campaign
Healthy Schools Network
National Assembly on School-Based Health Care
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association of School Nurses
National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health
National Education Association Health Information Network
Nemours
Prevent Blindness America
Public Health Nursing Section, American Public Health Association
School Social Work Association of America
Trust for America's Health
Voices for America's Children