June 5, 2020

Mr. Eric C. Davis, Chairman
State Board of Education
301 North Wilmington Street, Room 212
6302 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-6302

Dear Chairman Davis:

On behalf of the North Carolina Pediatric Society, the state chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the North Carolina Academy of Family Physicians, state chapter of the American Academy of Family Physicians, we thank you for your long-standing commitment to the safety and well-being of student athletes throughout our state. Given your earnest dedication to our youth, and in a spirit of collaboration, we wanted to raise concerns about recent policy changes related to pre-participation physical examinations and offer suggestions as future actions are considered, such as soliciting the input of physicians in future student health decisions and stressing with LEAS that while sport physicals may not be required, they are still recommended best practice for the health and well-being of students.

As pediatricians and family physicians, we strongly affirm that comprehensive annual assessments remain important for youth and protecting the overall well-being of student athletes. Primary care practices throughout the state have taken significant steps to ensure access and safety for families despite the complexities brought about by the pandemic. Our practices have continued to provide uninterrupted care for our most vulnerable children, ranging from newborn infants to children with complex chronic illnesses, in a safe and effective manner. Waiving the requirement for sports clearance forms communicates to families that the risks of coming to their medical home outweigh the risks of forgoing essential preventive services during a time of heightened health risks for all young people, which is simply untrue.

Pre-participation physical examinations are only one part of a comprehensive annual assessment of well-being for youth. These annual encounters represent a critical opportunity to not only provide physical assessments and sports clearance but also administer other essential health screenings and deliver preventive services such as immunizations. Adolescence is a time of dramatic change and much can happen even in the space of single year. Further, in the context of the pandemic, youth are at heightened risk of mental health problems and health-compromising behaviors, and clinical assessments in their medical homes are a crucial opportunity to proactively identify and address such risks. Indeed, comprehensive health assessments have never been more important. As such, our members will continue to urge families to complete comprehensive annual visits in their medical homes even if sports forms are not required by schools.
If there are opportunities to partner in communicating effectively with families during this time, we would be eager to discuss them. Families should understand that completion of a sports form is not the same as completing all recommended health services. We urge you to encourage local school districts and schools to note that the temporary waiver of the sports form requirement is in no way meant to communicate that annual visits are not still the standard of care. Early observations from our members suggest that families may not fully appreciate these critical distinctions.

Finally, we would be happy to provide additional guidance as future actions are considered around COVID or other health issues. There are many bright and creative child health professionals in our memberships who would relish the opportunity to contribute to efforts to further improve the safety and well-being of youth, especially during this challenging time.

As pediatricians and family physicians, we know the mental and physical health benefits of sports participation are substantial for youth and we are supportive of any measures that will allow students to participate safely in desired physical activities. We look forward to ongoing partnership.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Chung, MD, FAAP
Board member, North Carolina Pediatric Society

Susan Mims, MD, MPH, FAAP
President, North Carolina Pediatric Society

David A. Rinehart, MD, FAAFP,
President, NC Academy of Family Physicians.

CC: Mark Johnson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction