

March 9, 2005

To: Kansas House Health and Human Services Committee  
From: Cindy D'Ercole, Sr. Policy Analyst  
Re: SCR 1604 - healthy eating and physical activity in public schools.

Kansas Action for Children supports enactment of SCR 1604.

SCR 1604 requests the Kansas State Department of Education to begin addressing the importance of healthy eating by conducting a study of the state's public schools. The requested parameters of the study will allow schools to look at a broad range of conditions and circumstances that contribute to healthy school environments for children.

These include:

- School food programs;
- The availability of classes on health;
- Physical activities intended to promote healthy bodies and physical fitness; and
- The availability of other food on the premises (including vending machines).

This study will also aid the State Department of Education in its efforts to implement the federal Child Nutrition Act. The Act became effective on June 30, 2004 and requires every school district that receives federal funds to establish a local wellness policy by June 30, 2006.

Although the language of the bill specifically focuses on child and adolescent obesity, it is clear that this study has a full range of implications for children's health including oral health. Proper nutrition has an immediate impact on children's ability to learn, as well as on children's oral health and obesity prevention. Research shows that changes in the school food environment can impact food choices and improve the quality of children's diets while at school. Growing awareness of the importance of the obesity epidemic and oral health presents a clear opportunity to require schools to study school environments and how they can improve the well-being of Kansas children.

### **Obesity Prevention**

There are serious, long-term health consequences of childhood obesity. Childhood and adolescent obesity contributes to asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, low self-esteem, and adult obesity. The prevalence of obesity among adults in Kansas has increased by almost 70 percent since 1992. More than one in five adult Kansans are now obese and almost three in five are at least overweight. Reversing the epidemic of obesity in Kansas will require focusing on obesity prevention in children.

### **Oral Health**

When teeth come in frequent contact with soft drinks and other sugar-containing substances, the risk of decay formation is increased. Oral health is a critical but often overlooked component of overall health and well-being among children and adults. Dental caries (tooth decay) is the most common preventable chronic childhood disease. Pain from untreated dental disease can lead to eating, sleeping, speaking, and learning problems in children and adolescents, which affect a child's social interactions, school achievement, general health, and quality of life. In fact, approximately 51 million school hours per year are lost because of dental-related illness.

**Improving the health status of Kansans begins with improving the health of Kansas kids.** Healthy eating patterns are essential for students to achieve their full academic potential, full physical and mental growth, and lifelong health and well-being. Healthy eating is demonstrably linked to reduced risk for mortality and development of many chronic diseases as adults. Schools have the opportunity to help students establish and maintain lifelong, healthy eating patterns. Well-planned and well-implemented school nutrition programs have been shown to positively influence students' eating habits.



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