



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

PO Box 47990 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

January 31, 2008

The Honorable Dave Quall, Chair
Education Committee
Washington House of Representatives
209-A John L. O'Brien Building
Post Office Box 40600
Olympia, Washington 98504-0600

Dear Representative Quall:

I am writing as chair of the Washington State Board of Health to support the concept of House Bill 2722, which is scheduled to be heard by your committee tomorrow afternoon. The bill would require the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's Center for the Improvement of Student Learning to convene an advisory committee to develop a strategic plan to address the academic achievement gap for African American students.

Academic risk for African American youth is approximately twice what it is for non-Hispanic white youth. Data from the 2006 Washington Healthy Youth Survey demonstrate that a number of 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 African American youth than among their non-Hispanic white counterparts. Therefore, interventions that reduce health risks for African American students are a possible mechanism for reducing disparities in academic achievement.

Just as health risks are associated with academic risk, 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 academic achievement gap for African American students, therefore, has the potential to reduce significant health disparities over time.

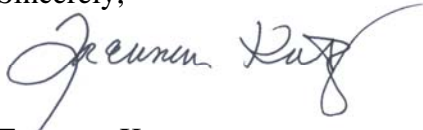
One of the Board's strategic goals is to reduce health disparities, in part by supporting efforts to simultaneously reduce health disparities and the academic achievement gap. While the Board supports this bill in concept because it has the potential to reduce health disparities in the long term, it would like to see public health representation on the advisory committee. As part of its work, the committee should examine and recommend interventions that address the link between health and academic achievement, and develop performance measures that include improvements in health behaviors and outcomes.

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Moreover, if this approach proves effective, the Board hopes it would lead to similar efforts to identify culturally appropriate strategies for promoting the academic success of American Indian and Alaska Native students, Hispanic students, and students from Asian and Pacific Islander subgroups that also suffer from inequitable academic and health risks.

Thank you for considering this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Treuman Katz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Treuman" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Katz".

Treuman Katz
Chair

cc: House Education Committee Members
The Honorable Eric Pettigrew, State House of Representatives
State Board of Health Members
Dr. Andy Griffin, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Ms. Isabel Munoz-Colon, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Ms. Christina Hulet, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Mr. Jonathan Seib, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Mr. Brian Peyton, Department of Health
Mr. Craig McLaughlin, State Board of Health