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Before the Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities

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Chairwoman McCarthy and members of the Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities, I am Nancy Copperman, MS, RD, CDN, Director of Public Health Initiatives, Office of Community Health of the North Shore-LIJ Health System. The Health System is the tenth largest not-for-profit health system in the Nation that serves the 5.4 million residents of Nassau, Suffolk, Queens and Richmond Counties in the New York metropolitan area. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to discuss the importance of implementing and monitoring physical activity goals of the Local Wellness Policy requirement as established by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. The local wellness policy was designed to promote the health of students and address the growing problem of childhood obesity. I would like to present some data in the support of increasing physical activity in schools, the barriers that prevent the implementation of physical activity goals of the Local Wellness Policies and discuss a school-based wellness program, Activity Works, that addresses the needs of and obstacles to implementing these policies.

The prevalence of pediatric overweight and obesity is increasing in epidemic proportions in the United States. Over 33 % of US children ages 6 -11, were overweight or obese in 2006 representing a tripling of the prevalence of obese children since 1980. Several environmental factors have been linked to increased Body Mass Index in children. These

factors include reduced physical activity and increased leisure time spent viewing television. Current physical activity guidelines from the Expert Committee Regarding the Prevention, Assessment, and Treatment of Child and Adolescent Overweight and Obesity are in agreement with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Institute of Medicine. These physical activity recommendations state that children should engage in 60 minutes of physical activity daily. National surveys of childhood physical activity patterns indicate that less than 50 % of children meet this goal. Expanding physical activity programs in elementary schools through the implementation and monitoring of Wellness Policies and Physical Education requirements can play a significant role in containing and even preventing overweight and obesity in children.

National data from the 2006 School Health Policies and Programs Study indicates that only 3% of elementary schools provided daily physical education or its equivalent (150 minutes per week in elementary schools) and only 13% of elementary schools provided physical education at least 3 days per week or its equivalent for the entire school year for students in all grades in the school.

A recent audit of New York State elementary schools compliance with physical education regulations found that students in 18 of the 20 sampled districts did not meet the minimum requirements of daily physical education and a weekly total of the required 120 minutes of physical education. On average, kindergarten through sixth grade students were provided only 48 percent of the required daily classes and 72 percent of the required class time. The audited school districts cited the following major reasons for the difficulty in meeting the minimum physical education requirements:

- 1) Increased academic standards, requirements and testing fill elementary school schedules which results in limited time for a daily physical education class.
- 2) Lack of adequate physical education staff to meet frequency and time requirements due to budgetary constraints
- 3) Inadequate facilities/space to offer additional classes to meet the requirements

A local wellness policy for schools shall, at a minimum include goals for nutrition education, physical activity and other school- based activities that are designed to promote student wellness in a manner that the local educational agency determines is appropriate. It is designed to supplement established physical education programs but not replace them. Schools districts have been compliant in formulating these policies with physical activity goals. However, data on the implementation and monitoring of these strategies has not been directly measured and reported at this time. School Wellness Committees have reported that lack of resources such as staff and facilities impact on the implementation of physical activity programs related to their physical activity goals.

In 2007 in an effort to address the childhood obesity epidemic, the North Shore-LIJ Health System partnered with schools to develop the Activity Works Program which focuses on increasing children's daily physical activity through an integrated classroom approach to meet the needs of Wellness Policies and Physical Education requirements. The program is a community benefit program of the North Shore –LIJ Health System with additional support from a Community Building Grant from Bank of America and the in-kind resources for the pilot program from 5 school Long Island school districts. The program was developed using feedback from an eight month discovery process led by community health professionals from the North Shore- LIJ Health System which

convened a working group of parents, educators, administrators, public health and health care professionals. The process included a review of best practices and obesity prevention recommendations from expert panels, professional organizations and pediatric obesity experts as well as group discussions regarding the potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to developing a school-based wellness program. The stakeholder's consensus was that there is an urgent need for elementary school children to increase their physical activity both in school and at home to meet not only New York State Department of Education requirements but the Center for Disease Control's recommendation of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per day. The stakeholders felt that in order for the initiative to be successful the following criteria should be met:

School-based- to impact children where they spend a significant portion of their formative years.

Measurable- to demonstrate realistic outcomes throughout the pilot program

Scalable- a viable offering to any child grades 1-5, anywhere.

Sustainable- by cultivating participation, usage and loyalty in all stakeholders.

Simple- ease of adoption and implementation as a critical factor for success.

The goal of the Activity Works Program is to prevent obesity in elementary school children and is addressed by the following program objectives:

- 1) Increasing children's physical activity both during school hours and outside of school hours through a school-based program.

- 2) Decreasing the prevalence of overweight and obesity by promoting daily physical activity and healthy nutrition messages.
- 3) Demonstrating the feasibility and usability and of a classroom based physical activity program by cultivating teacher, administration and PTA support.
- 4) Increasing the sustainability of the program by integrating it into the Physical Education Curriculum of the school to aid in meeting Physical Education requirements
- 5) Using the program to implement physical activity goals of School Wellness policies
- 6) Improving children's scholastic competence (knowledge, listening skills, and attention span), athletic competence (exercise endurance) and behavioral conduct through daily program participation.

The Activity Works Program is a unique elementary school physical activity program that integrates subject matter (math, science, language arts, social studies, health, art, and music) with an exercise physiologist designed beat per minute exercise protocol. The CDs and DVDs contain original music and activities choreographed to the beat per minute protocol. The program was specifically created to be easily implemented by a classroom teacher who simply loads the CD or DVD into a player and the audio and/or video directs the class exercise program. The Physical Education staff in-service the classroom teacher on the program prior to its implementation and supervise its use throughout the academic year.

The themed Activity Works “toolkit” includes facilitator guidelines, activity CDs and DVDs, student calendars, sticker rewards and parent newsletters. The purpose of the varying monthly themes is to maintain high levels of engagement. Age-appropriate themes include Human Body Tour, Walk through a Book, Visit an Art Museum, and US

Tour. The calendars and sticker rewards offer positive behavior reinforcement for daily physical activity. The parent newsletters bring the program's healthy lifestyle nutrition and physical activity messages home to families. The program is currently in 5 New York school districts, 30 classes and reaches over 1000 students.

Superintendent, principal, educator, student and parent feedback has been extremely positive. Administrator and educator comments include improvement in student attention span, listening skills, behavior, fitness and knowledge. Student feedback states that the program is fun, interesting and the music and exercises are cool! Parents feel their children are more active and healthy. The Activity Works Program has been incorporated into the physical education curriculum of 3 school districts. It is used outside the classroom during standard physical education classes, morning assembly and indoor recess. The program has provided an additional 50 minutes of Physical Education /week increasing daily activity and meeting New York State Department of Education Physical Education requirements without increasing staffing and space needs. Its use as a morning assembly and indoor recess program enables schools to meet their Wellness Policy physical activity goals.

A North Shore-LIJ Institutional Review Board approved evaluation study is also being conducted in a sub-set of students from schools implementing the Activity Works Program and schools without the program who are acting as control subjects. The purpose of this pilot study is to evaluate the Activity Works Program effectiveness in obesity prevention, improvement of student's self-concept and physical activity and ease of classroom implementation by collecting and analyzing outcome data.

In order for a school Wellness Policy to be effective in promoting healthy lifestyles for students and prevent obesity it must address diet as well as physical activity. A well supported and resourced structure has been created by previous Childhood Nutrition Reauthorization Acts to improve nutrition standards and nutrient quality for school nutrition services including nutrition education components. These supports enable schools to implement the nutrition goals and objectives of their Wellness Policies. However, the support for implementing the Wellness Policy physical activity goals and objectives has been sparse. Schools desiring to increase physical activity encounter barriers of limited space, time, equipment and trained staff to achieve this goal. Physical activity programs that are designed to be integrated into existing curriculums utilize existing space and involve both physical education and classroom school staff need to be developed and supported. By increasing physical activity through the integration of subject matter and prescribed exercise in the classroom in daily 10 minute sessions, schools can address their physical activity wellness policy goals with gradual expansion to after school and home activities. Activity Works is an example of one such innovative program.

Thank you.