



June 12, 2007

Superintendent David Brewer
The Honorable Marlene Canter
President, Board of Education
Los Angeles Unified School District
333 S. Beaudry Ave., 24th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90017

Re: LAUSD Student Health, Physical Education, and Healthy Eating

Dear Superintendent Brewer and President Canter:

The undersigned urge Superintendent Brewer to address student health, physical education, and healthy eating in his State of the Schools address this week, and in the forthcoming strategic plan to be released in June 2007.

LAUSD does not enforce school physical education requirements under state law.¹ Evidence-based research published by the California Endowment and others documents the importance of physical education and healthy eating to improve student health, youth development, and academic performance, and documents unfair health disparities. Increased physical activity is associated with improved academic performance.² Over 87% of LAUSD children were not physically fit under state Fitnessgram standards in 2004.³ In LAUSD, the five largest PE class sizes averaged 93 students in middle schools and 87.5 in high schools.⁴ 91% of LAUSD children are children of color, and 74% are low income (qualify for free or reduced meals). LAUSD provides 71% more play acres for non-Hispanic white students than for Latino students in elementary schools.⁵ Only 103 out of 605 LAUSD schools have five acres or more of playing fields, and those tend to be located in areas that are disproportionately wealthy and non-Hispanic white. LAUSD does not take steps it could take to provide more space for physical activity. For example, there are only 30 joint use agreements between LAUSD and the City of Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Department as of April 2006.⁶

At LAUSD's South Gate High School, 1,600 children took the state Fitnessgram test and not one passed. Forty schools did not have a single physically fit student. Less than 10% of students were physically fit in nearly one-third of the 605 schools in LAUSD. Only eight schools had student populations that are

¹ California Center for Public Health Advocacy (June 8, 2006); Robert García and Aubrey White, *Healthy Parks, Schools, and Communities: Mapping Green Access and Equity for the Los Angeles Region* 9-10, 19-20 (The City Project Policy Report 2006) (“*Healthy Parks, Schools, and Communities*”).

² See, e.g., San Diego State University, *Physical Education Matters* 1 (California Endowment Policy Brief 2007) (“*Physical Education Matters*”); UCLA Center to Eliminate Health Disparities and Samuels & Associates, *Failing Fitness: Physical Activity and Physical Education in Schools* (California Endowment Policy Brief 2007).

³ *Healthy Parks, Schools, and Communities* at 9, Cal. Dep’t of Ed. Website, www.cde.cd.gov/ta/tg/pf/index.asp; Cara Mia DiMassa, *Here’s the Skinny: Most Students Aren’t*, L.A. Times, Nov. 25, 2004. See also Howard Blume, *It’s a stretch for schools to find enough space for P.E., As students’ health becomes a bigger issue, space constraints in L.A. Unified make fitness tougher to achieve*, L.A. Times, Nov. 26, 2006; Jennifer Radcliffe, *Going to War Against Epidemic of Childhood Obesity*, Daily News, Jan. 27, 2004.

⁴ *Physical Education Matters* at 4.

⁵ *Healthy Parks, Schools, and Communities* at 10.

⁶ *Id.*

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more than 50% physically fit.

Percentage of Physically Fit Children in LAUSD Schools⁷

Percentage of Physically Fit Children	Number of Schools in LAUSD
0%	40
1-5%	58
6-10%	96
11-15%	123
16-20%	83
21-25%	75
26-30%	42
31-35%	38
36-40%	22
41-45%	16
46-50%	4
>50%	8

The levels of child obesity are intolerably high even for children in the best neighborhoods—ranging from 23% to 39% throughout the Los Angeles region.⁸

Los Angeles City Controller Laura Chick recently published an audit of the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks calling for shared use of schools and parks as part of a strategic plan to improve recreation in every neighborhood and alleviate unfair disparities.⁹

Healthy eating is also a critically important component of any effort to reduce obesity and promote the healthy development of our children. LAUSD has made some progress on healthy diets with district-wide policies that are, in some cases, leading the country. However, even in the case of diet, there is little information about how effectively LAUSD's own policies are being implemented district-wide, and by individual schools.

For these reasons, we ask the Superintendent to address the health of our students, physical education, and healthy eating in his State of the Schools address next week, and in his forthcoming strategic plan.

Very truly yours,

Robert Garcia
The City Project

James Sallis, Ph.D.
Accelerating School Physical Activity Promotion (ASAP) Active Living Research

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*, Map 403.

⁹ City Controller Laura Chick, *Performance Audit of Recreation and Community Services in the Department of Recreation and Parks* 20 (Jan. 5, 2006); Deborah Schoch, *How Can L.A. Create Better Places to Play*, L.A. Times, June 1, 2007.

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American Diabetes Association

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Raul Macias
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Antronette (Toni) Yancey, M.D., M.P.H.
Center to Eliminate Health Disparities
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Patricia Gonzalez
City of Hope

Mark Williams
Concerned Citizens of Southcentral Los Angeles
Antes Columbus Football Club

John Wordin
Fitness Challenge Foundation

Olga Hall
Friends of the Southwest Museum

Mercedes Perez
The Healthy City Project

Aurora Flores
Healthy Eating Active Communities (HEAC)

Tomas Gonzalez
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)

Donzella Lee
Los Angeles Free Clinic

Gloria Robertson
Office of Statewide Health and Planning Development (OSHPD)

Chad Fenwick
Physical Education Advisor for Physical Education K-12 LAUSD
President of California Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance Unit 406

Dora Ortiz
Scripps Whittier Diabetes Program

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Don MacNeil
Shaping America's Health

Bernadine Bednarz
Southern California Committee for the Olympic Games

Barry A. Sanders
Southern California Committee for the Olympic Games

Jennifer Sluder, MD

Joel Olloa
Transportation and Land Use Collaborative

Joshua Pechthalt
United Teachers of Los Angeles, American Federation of Teachers

Wendy Slusser, MD, MS
Assistant Clinical Professor
UCLA Schools of Medicine and Public Health

Norma Mendoza
The Whittier Institute for Diabetes

Peter Vidmar
Olympic Gold medalist 1984

cc: Honorable LAUSD Board Members