



**Testimony to the Committee on Health
For the Performance Oversight Hearing on the Department of Health**

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February 16, 2012

Hello Committee of Health and Chairman David Catania. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present my testimony. My name is Kelly Nwogu. I am 16 years old and a junior at Woodrow Wilson Senior High School. I work at the Young Women's Project on the Peer Health And Sexuality Education team. In PHASE we advocate for reproductive health education for everyone, and change in our community, but today I am going to be talking about something a little different.

The topic I would like to address today is nutrition, health and wellness in schools. The District has the highest rate of adolescent obesity in the nation. According to the CDC, 18 percent of DC high school students are obese and 35 percent are overweight.¹ It is important to talk about wellness in school since we spend most of our time in school. Learning about nutrition, health and wellness encourages students to take better care of themselves, and gives them the tools needed to teach their communities about living a healthier lifestyle.

Nutrition and physical education is a major factor in everyone's health. We all strive to live healthy lives and the best way to do is to develop healthy habits at a young age. The first issue I'm addressing is nutrition in schools. I've recently observed complaints from a group of my peers about the school lunch on how it is not appetizing or don't have free lunch, which results to them not eating any lunch at all. Not eating any lunch is a major issue for everyone, especially young people. An even bigger issue is, when not choosing to eat lunch; kids tend to splurge on the cheap junk food that affects their health.

A 2006 report analyzed District food resources, and made some following conclusions that many healthy items are not available at every grocery store and tends to cost more. I've also noticed that with my peers. Most of them eat foods that are cheap and easily accessible, yet extremely unhealthy. School lunches are usually free for students who are eligible. Accessibility of food in schools is not a problem, nor is the nutritious value of the food, because of Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" campaign and the Council's Healthy

¹ Office of Mary M. Cheh. One Page Summary of the Healthy Schools Act. 18 Feb 2010



Schools Act. The issue with school meals lies in the preparation and taste of the food. Many of the meals, which are healthy, lack taste. This is unfortunate because it teaches youth that healthy food is nasty and cannot be enjoyed. My peers need to realize that a healthy meal can be enjoyable and flavorful too. I suggest that the DCPS cafeteria system needs to change their menus to appetizing foods.

Another issue I'm addressing is the physical education/gym curriculum. In DCPS it is usually required to have one full credit of P.E. It is usually taken in 9th and 10th grade for one semester, which equals .5 credits for each. In my experience, I've noticed that students don't participate in class. Instead of participating in class students socialize and waste time instead of getting their physical fitness. For example, when I took gym I would sit in the gym and just talk to my friends for the whole period. The teacher would suggest a game to play but made it optional. This issue is probably because there is lack of other electives to be apart of. This affects my peers and I because we are not being taught on how exercise to take care of ourselves. I believe that the best way to solve this is by giving more electives for physical education/gym. For example, like yoga, aerobics, and pilates. Giving kids more choices within the physical education curriculum will encourage them to become advocates for their health, teach them to exercise on their own, and also contribute to them living a healthier lifestyle.

Councilmember Catania and member of the Committee, I am asking that you all make health, nutrition, and wellness in schools a priority this year; we have great legislation in the Healthy Schools Act, but need your support to move forward to ensure that students are learning that healthy food can be delicious and exercise can be done in a variety of fun ways on your own or in a group. We need to get youth more involved in the conversations and decisions about food and exercise in school, and my peers and I at the Young Women's Project are willing to work with you on this to tackle these issues.

Overall, I believe that DCPS should change their cafeteria menus and also give electives in physical education curriculum to better our community in nutrition, health and wellness. Thanks again for your time
Committee of Health and Chairman David Catania.