Good morning, and thank you for this opportunity. I am Bill Dietz, a pediatrician and Chair of the Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness at the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University. Prior to coming to Washington, I was the Director of the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for nearly 16 years. I currently serve as a Commissioner on the District’s Healthy Youth and Schools Commission and chair its Subcommittee on Physical Activity.

As the Committee considers the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Budget for the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), I want to call your attention to two areas that impact the health and well-being of our students. The first is physical activity and nutrition in schools and budget considerations related to the Healthy Students Amendments Act. As you know, Council unanimously passed the Act last year and it became effective on March 13th, but its implementation is subject to appropriations. The second area is the need for further investment in the promotion of trauma-informed practices in District schools, including trauma-informed training and professional development for teachers and school staff, as envisioned by the Student Fair Access to School Act, which was introduced by Chair Grosso and enacted last year.

**Physical Activity and Nutrition in Schools**

Prior to addressing the particulars of what Council can do to ensure implementation of the Healthy Students Amendment Act, I want to emphasize why physical activity in schools is so critical for our children’s health, well-being, and academic achievement.

To put it simply—children and teenagers who are physically active on a daily basis do better in school and are healthier. The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend that all youth be physically active for at least 60 minutes per day. Solid evidence indicates that this amount of physical activity not only is essential for health, but also supports children’s cognitive development and impacts their academic performance.
There is no drug that has more positive effects on health and brain function than physical activity. As I have shared with you before, a recent clinical trial published in *Pediatrics* showed that 7 to 9 year olds who met daily physical activity recommendations not only improved aerobic fitness, but also showed better brain function and executive control – compared to the children who did not meet the daily recommendation of 60 minutes.

Physical activity in schools is also linked to improved academic performance. CDC research has found positive associations between physical activity and academic performance. Data from the D.C. Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) showed that more than one third of high school students who reported getting mostly A's or mostly B's got at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day on five or more days of the previous week. Of those who reported getting mostly D's and F’s, about one in five (22 percent) got that level of physical activity.

Because physical activity is so critical to the healthy physical, emotional and cognitive development of children, I urge the Committee to take the steps necessary to implement the Healthy Students Amendment Act this year. Doing so will ensure that all District students are physically active and have access to nutritious meals during the school day, enhancing both their health and their academic performance.

As members of the Committee know, the Healthy Students Amendment Act was built upon the successes of the 2010 Healthy Schools Act. The Physical Activity subcommittee of the Healthy Youth and Schools Commission spent nearly a year examining the 2010 and crafting a set of recommendations to strengthen the physical activity components of the law. Many of these recommendations became part of the Healthy Students Amendment Act, including:

1. Setting an age-appropriate standard of 60 minutes per day for Pre-K physical activity, on which the 2010 law was silent
2. Shifting the number of physical education minutes set by the Healthy Schools Act from a mandate to a “goal,” to provide flexibility to schools in scheduling and also match the standards with current scheduling practices (i.e. in 45 minute blocks)
3. Creating a non-punitive mechanism with OSSE to help schools that did not meet the floor for PE minutes to develop an action plan and receive supports to increase physical activity
4. Require OSSE to provide and coordinate professional development for classroom teachers and staff to learn how to incorporate daily physical activity through “brain boosts,” and other activities that can keep students active throughout the day
5. Providing a daily recess for all students in elementary and middle schools.

These improvements provide a path for all schools to deliver the amount and type of age-appropriate physical activity that our children need. DCPS is already moving in
the right direction by hiring additional Physical Education teachers and support schools in scheduling PE and physical activity into the school day.

However, this progress is threatened because the new law was enacted subject to appropriations and the Mayor’s Budget proposal does not include the funds necessary to implement the law. It is important to note that while my focus is on the physical activity provisions in the Act, there are also key nutrition improvements. These include provisions to increase participation in school breakfast and update nutrition standards for school lunches. The fiscal impact statement found that the changes in the per student and per meal subsidy for school breakfast would cost $3.3 million over four years. The physical activity and physical education changes were not found to have a cost.

The council should take steps to fund the entirety of the law and provide OSSE with the resources necessary to fully carry out its support for schools and teachers to meet the physical activity goals laid out in the bill. While full funding is our preference, Council could also consider separating the physical activity components of the law, which did not incur any fiscal impact, and could be promptly implemented by OSSE. Why would we not provide physical activity, with its unmatched and powerful impact on health and learning, when it costs nothing?

Finally, as part of last year’s Budget Support Act, the Council provided $400,000 in grant funds under the HSA for schools to upgrade kitchen equipment, train food service staff, and provide nutrition education. These funds are critically important. They have allowed OSSE to better leverage USDA funds and invest in upgrades at a number of schools that are improving capacity to serve healthy and fresh food to our students. We understand these funds were intended to be recurring and urge the Committee to ensure they continue in FY 20.

**Funding the Student Fair Access to School Act and Trauma-Informed Schools**

I also urge the Council to provide the funding necessary to provide training and professional development on trauma-informed and restorative practices for all school staff in the District as envisioned by the Student Fair Access to School Act.

Exposure to traumatic, negative events and stressors—referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)—are directly linked to brain development, behavior, and the ability of children to learn. ACEs can also impact health outcomes later in life, by increasing the risk of obesity and other chronic diseases. ACEs include traumatic events such as abuse or witnessing violence as well as family disruption, including maternal depression, parental incarceration or addiction. The impact of ACEs is dose-related—greater numbers of exposures increase the likelihood of adverse outcomes. The 2016 National Survey of Children’s Health (conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau) found that over 47% of all children in the District have been exposed to an ACE and nearly one in four District children have experienced 2 or more ACEs.
ACEs also impact student behavior. Traumatic experiences activate a child’s stress response system, and the body responds with a “fight, flight or freeze” reaction, which releases hormones meant to be protective. However, repeated exposure to trauma may lead to an over-reactive stress response system. When this occurs, it is as if a child is in a constant state of emergency. Minor occurrences at school, such as a misguided joke from a classmate or a perceived slight from a teacher, can lead to a disproportionate reaction. Creating trauma-informed schools is a critical intervention that can help children build resilience and bounce forward, even in the face of adversity and trauma.

Chairman Grosso’s budget letter to the Mayor included a request for $8.3 million to provide trauma-informed training and professional supports for all school staff. I strongly support that request and urge council to provide the resources needed to begin making all of our schools trauma-informed.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments on how the OSSE budget can support healthy students.