

Governor's Press Conference: Healthy Schools Act

A coalition of child health advocates was invited to join Governor Eliot Spitzer and his staff at a press conference held in Albany on May 6th for the public introduction of his Healthy Schools Act. NYS PTA's Assistant to the President, Rick Longhurst, along with the Governor, Lieutenant Governor David Paterson, and State Health Commissioner Richard Daines and other advocates addressed the executive proposal to create healthier schools by improving nutrition and enabling local communities to shape school wellness policies.

The Governor stated that "Good nutrition and healthy eating habits begin when children are young. This legislation is an important step in the fight against childhood obesity, which has reached crisis levels in the State of New York. By working together with local communities we are building a strong foundation for academic performance and future success that is built upon good nutrition and robust physical activity."

The Healthy Schools Act will:

- ◆ Limit the types of beverages that may be served during the school day to milk, 100-percent fruit and vegetable juices; and water;
- ◆ Enhance the Department of Health's responsibilities under the Childhood Obesity Prevention Program to include collaboration with nutrition and physical education professionals by utilizing age-appropriate measurements of body mass index (BMI) to develop a comprehensive approach to improve health and nutrition for school age children;
- ◆ Ensure that more students receive a daily breakfast by requiring districts that participate in the National School Lunch Program to establish a school breakfast program for middle and high schools;
- ◆ Require the annual development of local school wellness policies to address health and nutrition in schools and to consider expanding breakfast, lunch and recess to ensure that sufficient time is provided to eat nutritious meals and participate in physical activity.

New York State PTA President, Maria DeWald said: "Since its founding in 1897, NYS PTA has worked diligently to ensure both physical and nutritional health for New York's children. Most recently, our efforts have focused on building an awareness of healthy choices, "saving recess" and reducing the availability of non nutritious a la carte and vending items that unfortunately have become part of today's school culture. New York State PTA strongly supports Governor Spitzer's efforts to invest in strategies that will assure the development of healthy minds by attending to the value of building healthy bodies."

The Governor's legislation incorporates components of the Galef/LaValle bills promoting healthy school foods and beverages and adds enhancements through requirements that will promote physical activity in schools. The Healthy Schools Act addresses a number of actions supported by NYS PTA positions on Healthy School Foods, Healthy Choices, and Recess for Students. This will be important legislation to track!