

# Healthy and Ready to Learn:

Recommendations for  
Illinois' Governor

NOVEMBER 2018

**HEALTHY SCHOOLS**  
CAMPAIGN

EVERY CHILD DESERVES TO LEARN + THRIVE

## Letter From the CEO

Illinois is a vibrant state with rich history and a promising future. Centrally located in the heart of the country, Illinois serves as a major transportation hub and thoroughfare, boasting a diverse economy, booming urban areas, sprawling farmlands and plentiful natural resources. But Illinois faces many challenges in realizing its promising future: declining population, aging infrastructure, a spiraling opioid epidemic, ongoing fiscal instability - to name just a few.

The challenges we face are immense, complex and interrelated. Illinois has the opportunity to address these challenges by making critical investments in areas that are vital to our foundation and the well-being of our families and communities. Education and health are two clear, common-sense areas that can help Illinois prepare for the future. There is no shortage of research showing that an educated population is happier, more productive and increasingly successful. And educators know that healthy students are better prepared to learn and succeed in school.

For more than 15 years, Healthy Schools Campaign has worked with schools, administrators, parents, teachers, students and community members to create policies and practices that support student health and school wellness. We have seen firsthand how healthy school environments positively impact students' all-around well-being and help build a solid foundation for learning. In healthy schools, good nutrition, physical activity, safety, clean air and water and access to quality health care services allow students the opportunity to grow and succeed. In healthy schools, students learn - through lessons and through example - to value their own health and that of the environment.

Common sense policy decisions can positively impact the health and academic success of students, particularly our most vulnerable and underserved populations. As elected officials, educators, health providers, advocates, and families and communities, we all have a responsibility and role to play in readying our students for success. Fostering health-promoting environments for students ensures our next generation of learners are prepared to the very best of their ability to actively engage and participate as our state's thinkers, workers and leaders.

The start of a new administration is an opportunity to reflect, plan and build for the future. With clear support and leadership from the state, schools and educators can be more empowered than ever in ensuring all schools can support the health needs of students.

I look forward to working closely with state leadership, partners, schools and communities across Illinois and the progress we will make together in giving all children a chance for a healthy, brighter tomorrow.

Sincerely,



Rochelle Davis, President and CEO

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## About HSC

Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC), an independent not-for-profit organization, is a leading authority on healthy school environments and an expert voice for people who care about the health and education of children. Since beginning as a local initiative in Chicago in 2002, HSC has grown into a vibrant national organization with diverse strategic partnerships and effective outreach strategies, working in step with schools, communities and policymakers. HSC advocates for policies and practices that allow all students, staff and faculty to learn and work in a healthy school environment, including those related to school health services, healthy school food, physical activity, behavioral and mental health services, trauma, environmental health and staff training and wellness. HSC engages, organizes and mobilizes constituencies to provide them with the necessary knowledge and skill to have a voice in health and wellness policy at the local, state, and national levels and works to ensure that schools have the capacity not only to support, but also to sustain, a healthy school environment.

## Executive Summary

We can create a better future for our children and state by supporting schools in ensuring kids are healthy and ready to learn. The next governor of Illinois has a tremendous opportunity to support local schools and communities across the state in creating the conditions of student health and wellness, giving all children a chance to learn and thrive.

Schools are the ideal setting for combining state health and education goals for all children. Children and adolescents spend more time in schools than in any other environment outside of their homes. They also form foundational health habits during their school years. By emphasizing school health and wellness, state leadership can support both the health and education sectors in fulfilling their goals and ensuring a bright and prosperous future for Illinois.

Schools don't have it easy: decreased resources, aging buildings, overpopulated and understaffed classrooms. Many students and their families face systemic poverty and a lack of access to quality health care. Adding to these challenges are critical concerns regarding school safety, civil rights, student discipline and other pressing issues that require immediate attention. Educators witness the impact these issues have on students every day, manifesting in chronic absenteeism, behavioral and emotional issues, and chronic health conditions, all which contribute to poor academic performance. Connecting learning and health means building the systemic supports that ensure schools have the tools to address these challenges and build a culture of health for students.

Illinois faces many challenges in securing a future that is economically and fiscally stable and prosperous. Education can, should and does play an important role in helping to solve these challenges. But educators and schools cannot, and should not, bear the burden alone in facing and addressing these demands. The following recommendations are ways in which state leadership can support schools and their communities in creating conditions for improved school wellness and student health.

**Education Policy:** Leverage the flexibility afforded to states under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act to make targeted, smart investments in education through school wellness and student health.

**School Health Services:** Ensure all students have access to quality physical, behavioral and mental health services each day in school, allowing them to be present, focused and ready to learn.

**Healthy School Foods:** Provide all students with access to healthy and nutritious meals, upholding strong nutrition standards and supporting locally sourced foods.

**Healthy School Environment:** Cultivate healthy school environments through investments in green and sustainable infrastructure, operations, and outdoor spaces.

## Education Policy

Education policy is a powerful tool for building school environments that support healthy learners. Policies at the national and state levels that set priorities and determine funding have a major impact on policies and practices implemented across local districts and in schools. Illinois has an opportunity to build upon recent progress in both federal and state policy to more fully integrate health and wellness into state and local education strategy.

In December 2015, the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a major overhaul of federal education legislation, was signed into law. ESSA gives states and school districts significantly more authority and flexibility to create standards for accountability and regulate school performance. In addition, the law specifically recognizes the need for schools to support the whole child, which provides additional opportunities and incentives for states to prioritize student health and wellness and to address health disparities, resulting in a more well-rounded and equitable education program.

Illinois' state ESSA plan, which was approved August 2017, highlights the new opportunities ESSA presents for supporting the learning and health connection. The vision set forth in the plan is: "Illinois is a state of whole, healthy children nested in whole, healthy systems supporting communities wherein all citizens are socially and economically secure." There are a number of important opportunities for advancing this vision through ESSA implementation, such as integrating health and wellness in state and local needs assessments and school improvement processes and developing tools and resources to support school districts in using ESSA funding to implement health programs and services.

### *Education Policy Opportunity Areas*

#### **Chronic Absenteeism**

Under ESSA, every state was required to create an accountability system for its state plan with at least four indicators of their choosing, including one indicator of school quality. Ultimately, 36 states, including Illinois, chose to include chronic absenteeism as a school quality measure in their accountability systems. In addition, all Illinois schools are now mandated to report on chronic absence rates on their local report cards.

Chronic absenteeism, commonly defined as missing ten percent or more of school days for any reason, excused or unexcused, detracts from learning and is a proven early warning sign of academic risk and school dropout. While the causes are multifold, one stands out as especially significant: student health. Students with unmanaged chronic health conditions (such as asthma or diabetes) are more likely to miss class due to experiencing symptoms of their illness or because they are receiving medical treatment during the school day. Students can also be chronically absent because of health issues such as fever, flu, dental pain, vision problems or mental health and anxiety issues.

Nationwide, approximately one in seven students was chronically absent, missing at least 15 school days during the 2015-16 year. Illinois ranked 29th out of the 50 states and District of Columbia with 16.5 percent of children chronically absent. While Illinois has taken some initial steps, such as including chronic absenteeism in its state education accountability system, passing legislation adopting a set definition for chronic absenteeism and launching the Illinois Attendance Commission to study the issue further, there is more that the state can do to set standards and provide support to schools in addressing the health-related causes of chronic absenteeism.

### ***Recommendations***

#### **Rec 1: Establish set definitions for key terms related to chronic absenteeism.**

- Establish definitions stating constitution of a school day, an absence, and a student. Recommended definitions include the following:
  - School day: Students are considered absent after missing half the school day.
  - Absence: Include unexcused, excused, and disciplinary absences; allow few uncounted absences.
  - Student: Include all students who have been in school 10 days; set firm disenrollment policies.

#### **Rec 2: Create a robust set of guidance and tools for school districts and partners in addressing chronic absenteeism.**

- Develop stakeholder-specific toolkits that address the health-related causes of chronic absenteeism (i.e. district officials, school leadership and staff, parents and families).
- Ensure data tracking processes are in place to properly track, audit, and share absence data.

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### **Health and Wellness Integration**

While the inclusion of chronic absenteeism as a non-academic indicator in the Illinois education accountability system is a good start, much more can be done to improve state health and wellness policies and to expand the integration of health and wellness into school policy implementation and ensure that the state's vision of ESSA is realized.

Physical education and activity policies are an immediate opportunity for the state to take action and have an immediate positive impact on students; in fact, seven states chose measures related to physical education and/or fitness as a school quality indicator in their ESSA plan. Students who are physically active tend to have better grades, school attendance, cognitive performance and classroom behaviors. In addition, increased time spent engaging in physical activity, such as recess or physical education class, is not likely to detract from academic performance, even when less time is devoted to other subjects.

In addition, school needs assessments and improvement plans should be updated to include additional health and wellness indicators and provide a framework for schools to address these

issues. Low-income students and students of color are at increased risk for health problems that impede learning. These students are also more likely to attend schools with unhealthy environments and limited health services. Unless we address these disparities in health status and school environments, efforts to close the education achievement gap will fall short.

### ***Recommendations***

#### **Rec 1: Update physical education policies and ensure transparency of associated data.**

- Update PE requirements to require 150 minutes per week (elementary) and 225 minutes per week (secondary).
- Update PE waiver process, limiting waivers to two years with no more than two renewals (six years total). Make publicly available data on waivers applied for and approved.

#### **Rec 2: Update school needs assessments and improvement plans to include health and wellness indicators.**

- Build upon the effort to expand inclusion of health and wellness indicators on school report cards by requiring the inclusion of these indicators in school needs assessments and improvement plans.
- Build a comprehensive, continuous system of reporting, accountability, assessment, and planning to address student health and wellness needs.

#### **Rec 3: Issue guidelines on ESSA funding eligible for support of health and wellness services.**

- Issue state guidelines that clearly outline what monetary resources are available through ESSA and how they can be used to support health and wellness programs and initiatives.

#### **Rec 4: Mandate inclusion and evaluation of health and wellness technical assistance providers.**

- Require inclusion of, create qualification requirements for, and evaluate performance of state-approved student health and wellness support systems (IL-EMPOWER).

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### **School Climate**

Illinois has a responsibility and opportunity to foster a safe, supportive learning environment through positive school climate. School climate refers to the quality and character of school life, including the school's norms and values, the quality of interpersonal relations and social interactions, and the experience of physical and emotional safety, engagement, connection and support. Students who experience positive learning environments that are safe, supportive and engaging are more likely to improve academically, participate more fully in the classroom, develop skills that will help them be successful in school and in life and less likely to participate in disruptive behavior. Six states, including Illinois, included school climate measures as an indicator of school quality in their state ESSA plan.

Two critical areas that Illinois must address to support a positive school environment include student discipline policies and the arming of teachers with guns, which have recently been hotly debated and diminished at the federal level. Illinois has an opportunity to establish school discipline policies that treat all children fairly and provide practical tools and guidelines for educators to create safe, supportive and welcoming environments for all students, by adopting the federal 2014 joint school discipline guidance package, which is supported by more than 350 national organizations that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States.

As state legislatures examine ways to strengthen school safety measures, many have considered legislation regarding the arming of teachers in schools. Research shows that more guns in schools do not increase school safety. Instead of arming teachers, who should be focusing on student education, eligible federal and state education funds should be used to support evidence-based practices and interventions to keep students and schools safe, such as behavioral and mental health services, drug and violence prevention programs, mentoring and counseling programs, and other programs that support a healthy, active lifestyle.

Finally, Illinois must continue to be a leader in social emotional learning (SEL) and champion policies and programs that support schools in the successful implementation of strong SEL standards. SEL skills allow children to calm themselves when angry, make friends, resolve conflicts respectfully and make ethical and safe choices. Illinois was the first state to adopt comprehensive pre-K to high school SEL principles as part of the state's learning standards and has continued to serve as a model for other states.

### ***Recommendations***

#### **Rec 1: Promote policies and practices to eliminate unlawful racial and other discrimination in school discipline.**

- Promote or adopt 2014 federal school discipline guidelines, regardless or in case of federal rescission of these requirements.

#### **Rec 2: Continue to position Illinois as champion of social emotional learning (SEL) requirements.**

- Continue to support the implementation of Illinois' SEL standards through implementation surveys, model assessment systems, and provision of additional training resources for administrators, staff, and student support personnel.

#### **Rec 3: Enact state policy against arming educators.**

- Enact legislation that prohibits school districts from implementing policies enabling or requiring teachers and staff to be armed.
- Support evidence-based practices and interventions to keep students and schools safe.

## School Health Services

Increasing access to school health services is an important strategy to reach vulnerable and underserved children and support all children's health and academic achievement. Today, one in four children has a health issue that affects their ability to succeed in the classroom, double the number just 30 years ago. In addition, one in five children experiences a mental or behavioral health disorder such as ADHD, anxiety, depression or drug use each year. This has implications not only for children's long-term health, but also for their opportunities to learn and succeed at school.

Many of the health disparities that affect learning have a disproportionate impact on low-income and minority students. Any effort to close the academic achievement gap must include strategies to address these health disparities and create new opportunities to expand student access to critical health services. Ignoring health issues, or regarding them as outside the scope of education priorities, could undermine efforts to improve academic performance. Addressing the dual challenges of poor health and poor academic performance in these groups will give all children, regardless of ethnic or economic background, better opportunities for health and education.

School health services, including those addressing physical, mental, dental, vision and behavioral health, serve as powerful supports for education. School health providers, including school nurses, social workers, psychologists and others help to address student health problems, reduce absenteeism, improve academic achievement and enable principals and teachers to spend more time delivering instruction.

Illinois has an opportunity to support the goals of both the health and education sectors by increasing access to and improving the quality of school health services. It can do this by leveraging policy changes at the federal level, as well as implementing new state policies and providing resources to support the expansion and integration of health services in education.

### *School Health Services Opportunity Areas*

#### **School Health Services Expansion via Medicaid**

In December 2014, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued guidance that removed a key barrier to funding school health services known as the free care rule. The free care rule stated that Medicaid funds could not be used to pay for services that were available without charge to everyone in the community. While schools have been able to bill for services provided to Medicaid-enrolled students with individualized education programs (IEPs), the free care rule had prevented schools from receiving reimbursement for services delivered to non-special education students enrolled in Medicaid. This policy reversal removes a major barrier to expanding school health services by allowing for reimbursement of eligible services to any Medicaid-enrolled student.

For many states, including Illinois, implementing this change requires amendments to state policies and practices around Medicaid billing. Illinois has not yet taken the necessary steps to move

forward and take advantage of this opportunity, which will improve the health, well-being and academic success of students. The impact of this change can result in increased provision of critical services, including, but not limited to: behavioral and mental health care; Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) services; physician services; optometry services; dental services; and nutritional services. For districts serving low-income students, this gives Medicaid the potential to be a major funding source for school-based health services for the neediest populations.

### ***Recommendations***

#### **Rec 1: Complete CMS State Plan Amendment addressing Free Care Rule.**

- Submit State Plan Amendment to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services requesting amendment of the Illinois Medicaid plan to reverse the Free Care Rule.

#### **Rec 2: Update state school district billing guide and related resources to support Free Care Rule reversal.**

- Once the above SPA is approved, review, update and disseminate revised billing guides, trainings, and other resources and materials to school districts and partners.
- Ensure schools have adequate resources and infrastructure to support increased service delivery and billing. Collect and share best practices to support school districts in updating policies and programs.

#### **Rec 3: Require additional Medicaid reimbursement revenue be reinvested into school health services.**

- School districts should reinvest additional federal reimbursement for Medicaid services into health support services that supplement, but do not supplant, existing school resources.

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### **Health and Education Cross-Sector Collaboration**

As the health sector increasingly prioritizes prevention, population health, care coordination and chronic disease management, health providers are realizing that school health services are an opportunity for them to engage with otherwise hard-to-reach populations. School health services can also help them meet many of the metrics they are accountable for under federal guidelines, as well as reduce healthcare costs and improve access to quality of care. For example, school health services can reduce children's emergency room usage, facilitate enrollment in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program, increase immunization rates and lead to an overall healthier school population.

Connecting learning and health means building the systemic supports that ensure schools have tools to build a culture of health for students. It means building new connections and data-sharing arrangements between education and health systems, so children get the targeted health services and attention they need. It means promoting a broad definition of health that includes school climate and mental and emotional health. It means providing principals and teachers with the

knowledge and skills to build a healthy school environment. It means paying attention to the racial and socio-economic disparities in access to high-quality health and education that impact our most vulnerable students and widen the achievement gap.

Building collaborative efforts for student health across sectors requires thoughtful planning and coordinated efforts, which can result in comprehensive systemic changes that will have a lasting impact on improving student health.

### ***Recommendations***

#### **Rec 1: Require MCOs to develop and implement a plan for care coordination with LEAs and LEA healthcare providers.**

- As part of the Medicaid Managed Care Program, require contracted MCOs to plan for coordinated care with participating schools and school health service providers.

#### **Rec 2: Develop policy language that allows secure sharing of student health data.**

- Develop standard policy and processes for student health data sharing between MCOs, LEAs, and health care providers.

#### **Rec 3: Support effective partnerships and collaborations between the health and education sectors.**

- Support the continued convening of the Governor’s Cabinet on Children and Youth, Illinois Attendance Commission, P-20 Council, and other cross-sector collaborations with targeted, outcomes-specific mandates.
- Require ISBE, HFS, and IDPH actively partner to expand access to school health services.

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### **Health and Wellness Resources**

Ensuring every school has qualified school health providers, including physical, behavioral and sexual health services, is an important strategy for reaching vulnerable and underserved children and supporting children’s health and educational achievement. Research shows that school nurses reduce absenteeism and a higher nurse-to-student ratio is related to better attendance.

School-based health center use is associated with gains in grade point average and attendance; students without access to a school-based health center lose three times as much in-class time as students with access to a school health facility.

Despite the clear connection between school health services and student success, currently more than half of public schools do not have a full-time school nurse or counselor and only five percent of the nation’s students have access to a school-based health center. Significant disparities exist in access to school health services, with students in low-income schools less likely to have regular access to a school nurse compared to their peers in higher-income communities.

Ensuring schools are adequately staffed with qualified health and wellness service providers, including school nurses, psychologists, counselors and other support personnel, as well as the tools and resources they need to implement evidence-based interventions, is critical to supporting the health and wellness of students and their ability to remain in school and be ready to learn. Illinois schools are drastically understaffed in these areas, with many schools unable to ensure students have regular access to a school nurse or other wellness provider.

### ***Recommendations***

#### **Rec 1: Support schools in implementing evidence-based practices to address individual needs.**

- Create a repository of evidence-based interventions, including school health interventions, to address individual student needs and support underperforming schools.

#### **Rec 2: Ensure schools are adequately staffed with trained health and wellness service providers.**

- Ensure every student has access to qualified school support personnel each school day.
- Require annual reporting on school support personnel staffing data.
- Support the continued training and education of school support personnel.

## Healthy School Food

Many children consume at least half of their meals at school; for many children, food served at school may be the only food they regularly eat. Healthy meals play a critical role in supporting a school's core mission of education, especially when it comes to boosting students' concentration and cognitive function. Improved nutrition in schools can lead to increased focus and attention, improved academic performance, better classroom behavior and a better understanding of healthy eating behaviors.

In 2010, Congress reauthorized the Child Nutrition Act - the policy that funds and defines the school food program and comes up for reauthorization every five years - with a bill called the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act. This included key policy progress, including: authorizing the USDA to bring the nutrition standards for the school meal program into alignment with the latest science-based dietary guidelines for the first time in more than 15 years; creating a federally-funded farm-to-school program; establishing guidelines supporting consistent healthy messages throughout the school, including limits on junk food advertising in schools; and providing a community eligibility provision, which increased access to healthy school food in districts with high percentages of low-income students.

While school food directly affects students' health, learning and lifetime wellness habits, it can also play a powerful role in driving positive change in our nation's food systems. School food is a \$16.3 billion federally funded program and can be used as a lever for comprehensive systems change at the state and local levels. This expansive use of public dollars creates an important opportunity for policy discussion and program development to support strong school nutrition standards, flexible school food procurement and growth of local food systems.

### *Healthy School Food Opportunity Areas*

#### **School Food Nutrition**

Nutritious school food helps students develop lifelong healthy eating habits. It also contributes to a culture of wellness at school, reinforcing nutrition education messages from teachers. Healthy school food can also increase school connectedness and reinforce that students' health and well-being are valued.

The new nutrition standards authorized by the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act went into effect in the fall of 2012. These standards brought significant progress, adding more fruits and vegetables and more whole grains, while trimming excess calories, fat and sodium. These nutrition standards have largely been a success in schools, with increased participation in the school meal program. Students prefer the new, healthier school meals and consume more fruits and vegetables at school, while throwing away less food.

However, the new standards have been subject to intense political attack from some members of Congress and food industry lobbyists. It is essential that Illinois remain focused on speaking up for

healthy school food, especially for the state's most vulnerable children. As an administrator of these federal programs, Illinois also has an opportunity to promote best practices and ensure public transparency in any waiver processes.

### ***Recommendations***

#### **Rec 1: Adopt strong nutrition standards and advocate for strong federal policies and guidelines.**

- Uphold the school food nutritional requirements of the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act and move forward with continued improvements for sodium, whole grains, and milk.

#### **Rec 2: Share best practices for district-level adoption of high nutrition standards.**

- Develop guidelines for school districts to implement high nutrition standards, utilizing national best practices.

#### **Rec 3: Ensure transparency in the whole grain waivers process and assess impact.**

- Make publicly available data on whole grain waiver requests and approvals.
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### **Locally Sourced Food and Food Waste Reduction**

Farm-to-school programs play an important role in school food initiatives through innovative procurement strategies, school garden development and parent and community engagement. Farm-to-school programs focus on bringing fresh, local food to schools and encouraging students to eat more fruits and vegetables, while also offering nutrition education and opportunities for hands-on learning related to health, agriculture and nutrition. Farm-to-school programs also help strengthen the local economy and create jobs for local farmers and producers.

In addition to sourcing locally grown, healthy food options for school meals, schools can implement zero waste strategies that focus on food recovery and composting, as well as source reduction and recycling. Composting food leftovers and byproducts helps reduce waste and reinvests nutrients into school and community gardens. Sustainably produced and package-free foods can help minimize initial environmental impact, while reusing and recycling materials can reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills.

Illinois has an opportunity to build upon existing efforts to promote the adoption and procurement of healthy, locally sourced food and sustainable zero waste efforts through direct leadership and guidance at the state level, working with local stakeholders and subject matter experts to develop policies and programs that can easily be implemented by schools.

### ***Recommendations***

#### **Rec 1: Fill Farm to School Network Program Director position at the Illinois Department of Agriculture.**

- Staff a Farm to School Network Program Director to provide assistance for Illinois producers looking to sell to institutional markets and foster the procurement of healthy, locally sourced foods in schools and other institutional facilities.
- Convene inter-agency task force that collaborates to support the increase of Illinois-grown food in meal programs and hands-on garden and culinary education in schools, early care programs, and other institutions.

**Rec 2: Promote the Good Food Purchasing Policy (GFPP) for school food procurement.**

- Revise procurement practices by updating the Invitation for Bid (IFB) process to allow objective consideration of vendors who incorporate higher quality and locally sourced food.

**Rec 3: Support policies and programs for zero waste schools.**

- Support efforts in schools to shift operations and minds towards generating zero waste through source reduction, recycling, composting, and food recovery.

**School Meal Programs**

Federal school meal policy leaves flexibility for states to determine standards in several key areas, including universal breakfast, USDA Foods options and whole grain standards waivers, as well as setting standards around competitive foods. Many states, including Illinois, provide additional funding to support school meal programs and prioritize healthy school meals. They can also provide guidance and support in implementation of best practices at the district level around issues such as food procurement and local school wellness policies.

In 2016, Illinois made great strides and passed Breakfast After the Bell legislation, ensuring students in 890 schools across the state are served breakfast as part of the school day. This increase in access to school breakfast ensures children are getting the nutrition they need in order to remain healthy, attentive and ready to learn. Illinois should continue to provide the support necessary to ensure successful implementation of this program, as well as explore additional ways to expand and sustain this and other school food program initiatives.

***Recommendations***

**Rec 1: Increase Breakfast After the Bell participation rates.**

- Support schools in implementing Breakfast After the Bell programming through dissemination of best practices and connections to philanthropic support in implementation.

**Rec 2: Uphold Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) standards and encourage partial district participation.**

- Continue Illinois' strong leadership in CEP, which dates back to the state's participation as a pilot state in the program's launch.
- Encourage all CEP-eligible schools in Illinois to participate, including partial district participation.

**Rec 3: Increase state funding for school meal reimbursement.**

- Increase state meal reimbursement levels per free breakfast and lunch provided.
- Pilot a per meal reimbursement program for districts using Illinois-grown products in meal program offerings, based on national best practices.

**Rec 4: Support ongoing outreach to families and communities regarding school meal programs.**

- Develop best-practice communications guidelines for marketing and advertising of school meal programs to parents and the community to increase awareness and student participation rates.

## Healthy School Environment

The physical environments in which children spend their time have a profound impact on their health and ability to learn. Given that children spend most of their waking hours outside of home in school, providing a healthy environment for all children at school can make an important impact on the lifetime health and academic success of the next generation. The quality of a school facility can also significantly impact the health and wellness of teachers and other staff.

Children, particularly young children, are especially vulnerable to environmental hazards, because they eat proportionally more food, drink more fluids and breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults. Various health and learning problems continue to be linked to pollutant exposure and children's responses to toxic substance can differ markedly from those seen in adults. As children, they are less able to protect themselves and it is up to us to ensure protections are put in place to keep them safe, healthy and ready to learn.

In addition, schools serving low-income and minority communities have higher rates of environmental health hazards as compared to the national average. These environmental factors can exacerbate health problems and contribute to perpetuating the academic achievement gap. In this context, even the best efforts by educators are hindered by unhealthy environmental conditions.

Ultimately, because school attendance is mandated by law, federal, state and local governments have a responsibility to provide healthy school environments. Critical environmental health and school facility issues that must be addressed include school building construction and operation, cleaning, air and water quality, safe transportation and access to outdoor learning and active play areas. Illinois has taken some steps to improve school environments, but much more can be done to set standards, provide guidelines and support additional programs that ensure all students and staff experience healthy school environments.

### *Healthy School Environment Opportunity Areas*

#### **Operations and Maintenance**

Operations and maintenance play a major role in the environmental health of a school. Health-promoting policies addressing issues including indoor air quality, toxic chemicals and lead-free water, can make a tremendous impact and demonstrate significant improvements soon after implementation. The cost and effort needed to prevent many issues is significantly less than that required to resolve problems after they develop and reduces the risk for short- and long-term health problems, costly repairs, potential liability problems and temporary school closures.

Illinois has taken steps to ensure healthy school environments with various legislation and policies in place supporting green and clean schools. However, much of this information is scattered across different resources, loosely overseen and implemented, and lacks true assessment of impact. In order for schools to successfully develop and implement individual policies and programs, as well

as ensure compliance with state and federal law, this information should be consolidated and presented in a user-friendly format and include existing best practices and guidelines. In addition, current regulations, school implementation levels and policy impact must be reviewed and assessed to identify areas in need of additional state guidance or legislative updates.

### ***Recommendations***

#### **Rec 1: Create a one-stop shop for schools to create healthy environments and ensure compliance with Illinois regulations.**

- Organize existing information and resources on Illinois laws, guidelines and resources supporting green and clean schools into a single location in a user-friendly format.

#### **Rec 2: Review existing green cleaning laws and assess implementation and impact levels.**

- Review current green cleaning regulations, assess school implementation levels and measure impact.
- Strengthen existing laws as needed and identify need for additional state guidance in targeted issue areas, accountability measures to ensure implementation, and data collection and tracking improvements.

#### **Rec 3: Expand Health, Life and Safety provisions of the Illinois School Code to develop Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) management plans.**

- Require schools to create and implement a comprehensive IAQ management plan.

#### **Rec 4: Require ongoing lead testing in water and set guidelines for addressing identified problems.**

- Continue recent efforts to ensure safe drinking water (SB550 - Lead in Drinking Water Act) and require ongoing, periodic testing and public dissemination of testing results for lead in school water.
- Set a health-based lead action level and mandatory action steps to address identified problems and require follow-up testing to ensure effectiveness of response.
- Continue to provide funding for testing and mitigation efforts.

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### **Green, Sustainable School Spaces**

Healthy, high-performing schools form the foundation of a healthy learning environment for students, enhance the productivity of teachers and staff, and create an overall sense of comfort, health and well-being. A healthy, high performing school improves student academic performance, promotes student and staff health, reduces operating costs, decreases a building's environmental impact and serves as a centerpiece for the community.

Making informed decisions about health and energy efficiency issues is important to the long-term vision for healthy schools and communities. For instance, where and how a school is constructed fundamentally shapes its impact on students, teachers and the environment. Health-promoting

policies on school siting, construction and renovation can have a significant impact on the health of building occupants and surrounding communities.

Green schoolyards are an important element of fostering a healthy school environment. These multi-purpose, environmentally beneficial spaces allow communities to gather to be physically active and give children an opportunity to play during recess, participate in a rich physical education program, experience hands-on lessons that support their curriculum and learn to love nature. They are a valuable asset that can help address childhood obesity, improve school performance and make communities happier, safer and healthier places. In addition, they can help city and state organizations protect infrastructure and natural resources such as drinking water and air quality.

### ***Recommendations***

#### **Rec 1: Adopt state standards for healthy school construction and renovation.**

- Adopt state standards for sustainable planning, design, materials and methods for new school construction and renovation, working with civic, district, and industry advisors
- Implement energy efficiency funding programs for schools.

#### **Rec 2: Support the development of green schoolyards.**

- Develop a program to expand the development of outdoor spaces for outdoor learning, physical activity and community engagement.
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### **School Transportation Environment**

The school day of a student begins and ends with transportation to and from school, whether via school bus, walking, biking, public transportation or other means. Ensuring children have safe and healthy modes of transportation to school is a critical piece in supporting a healthy school environment, while also positively impacting the health of our neighborhoods and communities.

Diesel school buses present a unique set of dangers for children, as children are particularly vulnerable to air quality hazards, breathing more air per pound of body weight than adults. Children waiting for, boarding and riding diesel school buses are continuously exposed to toxic diesel fumes; school ventilation systems also take in these fumes from idling buses, adversely impacting school teachers and staff. Exposure to these fumes can trigger and exacerbate childhood asthma, which is a leading cause of school absenteeism.

Schools can safeguard children from the harmful effects of diesel school bus pollution by implementing school bus idling laws and establishing electric school bus fleets. Electric school buses also maintain lower fuel costs, as well as lower operating and maintenance costs, than diesel school buses. In addition to implementing common sense policy, Illinois has a unique opportunity to capitalize on the recent Volkswagen settlement and promote the widespread adoption of electric school buses and phasing out of all diesel engines.

## ***Recommendations***

### **Rec 1: Enact a school bus idling law.**

- Enact policy restricting school bus idling, following national best practices.

### **Rec 2: Support schools in implementing an idle reduction policy.**

- Provide guidelines to schools for effectively implementing school bus and student drop-off/pick-up idling policies.

### **Rec 3: Support the use of electric school buses.**

- Ensure the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency remains committed to the minimum set-aside for electric school buses as part of the VW Settlement. Consider leveling the required match for contracted school bus fleets.
- Require schools districts to adopt a program to transition the district's school bus fleet from diesel to electric vehicles.

### **Rec 4: Improve the Safe Routes to School program.**

- Increase funding to the Safe Routes to School program.
- Eliminate barriers to participation for low- and moderate-income communities.
- Improve program administration to mirror national best practices.

## Recommendations for Illinois' Governor 2018

Rec No.	Recommendation	Timeline
<b>Education Policy</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>Set standards for and support schools in addressing chronic absenteeism</b>	
1A	Establish set definitions for key terms related to chronic absenteeism	1 year
1B	Create a robust set of guidance and tools for school districts and partners in addressing chronic absenteeism	1 year
<b>2</b>	<b>Expand the integration of health and wellness into school policies and programs</b>	
2A	Update physical education policies and ensure transparency of associated data	1 year
2B	Update school needs assessments and improvement plans to include health and wellness indicators	2 year
2C	Issue guidelines on ESSA funding eligible for support of health and wellness services	100 day
2D	Mandate inclusion and evaluation of health and wellness technical assistance providers	1 year
<b>3</b>	<b>Foster a safe, supportive learning environment through positive school climate</b>	
3A	Promote policies and practices to eliminate unlawful racial and other discrimination in school discipline	100 day
3B	Continue to position Illinois as champion of social emotional learning requirements	2 year
3C	Enact state policy against arming educators	1 year
<b>School Health Services</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>Update state policies supporting the provision of school health services through Medicaid</b>	
1A	Complete CMS State Plan Amendment addressing Free Care Rule	100 day
1B	Update state school district billing guide and related resources to support Free Care Rule reversal	1 year
1C	Require additional Medicaid reimbursement revenue be reinvested into school health services	1 year
<b>2</b>	<b>Ensure health and education partners are working together to provide quality services to students</b>	
2A	Require MCOs to develop and implement a plan for care coordination with LEAs and LEA healthcare providers	2 year
2B	Develop policy language that allows secure sharing of student health data	2 year
2C	Support effective partnerships and collaborations between the health and education sectors	4 year
<b>3</b>	<b>Ensure schools are fully supported with health and wellness resources</b>	
3A	Support schools in implementing evidence-based practices to address individual needs	2 year
3B	Ensure schools are adequately staffed with trained health and wellness service providers	2 year

Rec No.	Recommendation	Timeline
<b>Healthy School Food</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>Promote strong nutrition standards in school meals</b>	
1A	Adopt strong nutrition standards and advocate for strong federal policies and guidelines	4 year
1B	Share best practices for district-level adoption of high nutrition standards	1 year
1C	Ensure transparency in the whole grain waivers process and assess impact	1 year
<b>2</b>	<b>Promote the use of healthy, locally sourced food and reduction of food waste</b>	
2A	Fill Farm to School Network Director position at the Illinois Department of Agriculture	1 year
2B	Promote the Good Food Purchasing Policy for school food procurement	1 year
2C	Support policies and programs for zero waste schools	2 year
<b>3</b>	<b>Support strong implementation of school meal programs</b>	
3A	Increase Breakfast After the Bell participation rates	4 year
3B	Uphold Community Eligibility Provision standards and encourage partial district participation	4 year
3C	Increase state funding for school meal reimbursement	2 year
3D	Support ongoing outreach to families and communities regarding school meal programs	1 year
<b>Healthy School Environment</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>Establish health-promoting policies for school operations and maintenance</b>	
1A	Create a one-stop shop for schools to create healthy environments and ensure compliance with Illinois regulations	100 day
1B	Review existing green cleaning laws and assess implementation and impact levels	1 year
1C	Expand Health, Life and Safety provisions of the Illinois School Code to develop indoor air quality management plans	1 year
1D	Require ongoing lead testing in water and set guidelines for addressing identified problems	1 year
<b>2</b>	<b>Build green and sustainable indoor and outdoor school spaces</b>	
2A	Adopt state standards for healthy school construction and renovation	2 year
2B	Support the development of green schoolyards	2 year
<b>3</b>	<b>Ensure a healthy school transportation environment</b>	
3A	Enact a school bus idling law	1 year
3B	Support schools in implementing an idle reduction policy	2 year
3C	Support the use of electric school buses	2 year
3D	Improve the Safe Routes to School program	2 year

For questions or to discuss these  
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