



## Position Paper on Children's Health & Nutrition

The State Public Affairs Committee (SPAC) of the Junior Leagues, which represents approximately 3000 women in New Jersey, was founded on the premise of advocating for Women and Children in need.

SPAC supports programming and legislation to empower youth to make healthy lifestyle choices and help reverse the growing epidemic of childhood obesity which can in turn put youth at a greater risk for associated adult health issues including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, several types of cancer, and osteoarthritis. Initiatives designed to address access to a healthy school breakfast are also endorsed SPAC.

**Breakfast After the Bell:** SPAC members partner with the **Advocates for Children New Jersey** on their school breakfast campaign. The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) researches the link between eating breakfast, hunger, and learning. Recent studies have shown that eating breakfast

- at school helps improve children's academic performance<sup>1,2,3,4,5,6</sup>,
- at school improves student behavior and learning environments
- in the classroom programs offering breakfast free to all children in the cafeteria yield other positive results for health and learning, and
- at school can improve children's nutrition and protect against obesity

Although a federal program exists to ensure children start their school day with a full stomach, participation of New Jersey in the program is almost the lowest in the country. Presumably, the low ranking of NJ is because NJ districts serve breakfast before school starts – when most children have not yet arrived.

Serving "Breakfast After the Bell" significantly has been shown to improve participation and give more children a chance for a nutritious start to the school day that can help them focus and learn. Even with this evidence, NJ school districts are slow to adopt the "Breakfast After the Bell" approach due to concerns regarding clean-up, costs, staffing, lost instructional time. However, school districts that have adopted the program report these barriers are easily overcome and that children are showing better academic performance, less disruptive behavior, fewer trips to the school nurse, increased attendance, and reduced tardiness.

**New Jersey Office of Nutrition and Fitness (ONF):** Additionally, SPAC members help increase awareness of initiatives of ONF (<http://www.state.nj.us/health/fhs/shapingnj>). The Office of Nutrition and Fitness is a part of the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (NJ DHSS), Division of Family Services. Established in 2007, ONF was the first state office of its kind in the nation.

- *Shaping NJ*: public-private partnership designed to make the healthy choice the easy choice in New Jersey,
- *NJ Council on Physical Fitness and Sports* - a governor appointed council promoting safe and enjoyable physical activity in New Jersey
- *Fruit and Vegetable Program* – a national program designed to increase the amount of fruits and vegetables consumed, and
- *Health Corps* - a national program utilizing peer-mentoring in schools to improve nutrition and fitness in high-need populations.

**BMI Monitoring Bill (S111):** SPAC supports the The BMI Monitoring Bill requiring boards of education to calculate body mass index for students in 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grades to be maintained as part of the student’s health record. As part of that bill, parents/guardians shall be provided with information concerning the importance of developing healthy eating habits and promoting physical activity in children and adolescents.

### **Going Forward**

Obesity in children is a growing concern in NJ. NJSPAC is committed to helping our state help children to eat a nutritional breakfast “after the bell” in an effort to lessen hunger and improve learning as well as supporting the initiatives of the NJ Office of Nutrition and Fitness in response to rising numbers of obese children.

<sup>1</sup>Wesnes KA, Pincock C, Richardson D, Helm G, Hails S. “Breakfast reduces declines in attention and memory over the morning in schoolchildren.” *Appetite* 2003;41(3):329-31.

<sup>2</sup>Murphy JM, Pagano M, Nachmani J, Sperling P, Kane S, Kleinman R. “The Relationship of School Breakfast to Psychosocial and Academic Functioning: Cross-sectional and longitudinal observations in an inner-city sample.” *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* 1998; 152:899-907.

<sup>3</sup> Powell CA, Walker SP, Chang SM, Grantham-McGregor SM. “Nutrition and education: a randomized trial of the effects of breakfast in rural primary school children.” *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 1998;68:873-9.

<sup>4</sup>Pollitt, E. “Fasting and Cognition.” 1998. (see footnote #1)

<sup>5</sup>Jacoby E, Cueto S, Pollitt E. “Benefits of a school breakfast program among Andean children in Huaraz, Peru.” *Food and Nutrition Bulletin* 1996; 17:54-64.

<sup>6</sup>Bellisle F. “Effects of diet on behaviour and cognition in children.” *British Journal of Nutrition* 2004;92 (Suppl 2), S227-S232.