**ADVOCATE TEMPLATE LETTER TO:**

**School District Leaders, Principal**

Dear XXXX:

An abundance of scientific research has made the case that healthy students learn better. However previous education accountability models did little to prioritize what research indicated. The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) has helped to begin to create change. In fact, Kentucky implemented a new accountability model with new education priorities during the 2018-2019 school year. Kentucky’s Consolidated State Plan includes bold goals for closing the achievement gaps. Many of the strategies utilized by school districts during the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* era did little to impact closing the academic achievement gap. Schools and districts must consider innovative and modern approaches that place an emphasis on supporting the needs of the whole child to include health and physical education.

The Kentucky Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (KAHPERD), through the support of our national association SHAPE America, advocated for eight years to have health and physical education recognized as critical components of a student’s education. We are thrilled that Congress elevated both health and physical education in ESSA by including them as part of a student’s well-rounded education. This is an important designation for these two subjects that were left out of *No Child Left Behind*, the legislation’s previous authorization.

As part of a well-rounded education, health and physical education programs can now be supported by funding allocated to states for Title I, Title II and Title IV - Student Support and Academic Enrichment Block Grants and the 21st Century Community Learning Center program. Districts that adopt a Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child approach to planning and coordination will position themselves to have the greatest impact on meeting the needs of the whole child for every student.

After the passage of *No Child Left Behind* 15 years ago, we witnessed two alarming and most likely related trends. Health and physical education were too often considered ancillary subjects and therefore the first to be cut in state education budget shortfalls. In addition, child obesity rates reached epidemic proportions, with one in three children ages 10-17 either overweight or obese. This rise in the rate of childhood obesity in our nation contributes to an estimated $270 billion per year in healthcare costs. Rising healthcare costs have contributed greatly to our current pension crisis as well. Public schools in Kentucky play a critical dual role, not only educating and preparing the next generation but also schools represent nearly half of the state government workforce. Frequently local school boards are the largest employer in each county. Schools must better prioritize not only student health, but fully embrace health promotion for staff as well if you are to do our part in securing our fiscal health as a state.

Research has shown that participating in physical activity and physical education improves student attendance, test scores, participation and enthusiasm for other academic subjects, motivation to learn, and reduces discipline referrals. Evidence also shows that effective school health education reduces student participation in behaviors such as smoking, heavy drinking, school misbehavior, and violence. These are outcomes that not only will fully support the ambitious goals for closing the achievement gap found in Kentucky’s ESSA plan, but also will support a healthier more productive future workforce!

Educators that specialize in health and physical education deliver instruction that meets our existing state and professional standards, focuses on a specific course of study and incorporates student assessments and measureable outcomes. Health and physical education programs provide students with a foundation for a lifetime of health, wellness, and character development. For the 2019-2020 school year, the Kentucky Department of Education has released updated state standards for [health education](http://kahperd.com/health-education/) and [physical education](http://kahperd.com/physical-education/) that will reflect the critical role that these subjects have for improving health in the Commonwealth.

Now that health and physical education have been prioritized in ESSA at both the national and state level as part of a student’s well-rounded education and are allowable uses of federal education funding, we believe it’s vital that our district be engaged not tobegin implementing plans and priorities for the next school year.

My KAHPERD colleagues and I stand ready to provide you with any resources and guidance you may need and look forward to working with you on behalf of Kentucky’s students and staff.

Sincerely,