



April 24, 2018

Dear Dr. Young,

#### School Health Advisory Council Overview

The Abilene ISD School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) has met regularly during the 2017-2018 school year and looked at different programs and policies. As the district designee supporting the Abilene Independent School Health Advisory Committee (SHAC) this year, I am submitting the 2017-2018 recommendations on behalf of the Abilene ISD SHAC. I am also providing a summary of the membership and meeting dates. Teresa Bentle, mother of an Abilene High senior and a sophomore, has served as the SHAC Chair throughout the 2017-2018 school year.

A list of the 2017-2018 Abilene ISD SHAC membership is attached. The following are the dates that the SHAC have met and discussed topics pertaining to the health and wellness of our children:

- September 25, 2017
- November 27, 2017
- February 27, 2018
- April 23, 2018

Based upon substantial discussion and the priorities set by the SHAC membership this year, the SHAC would like to make the following recommendations to the Abilene ISD:

- First, we would like to thank the School Board for listening to the SHAC's recommendation for the past two years on increasing the recess time in elementary grades. The SHAC members were pleased to find that the majority of elementary students have the opportunity to participate in recess. This is in direct alignment with current research on recess and its impact on learning. The importance of recess has gradually eroded as more increased emphasis has been placed on academic accountability; however, the role of physical activity in the elementary school setting has documented positive contributions such as increased attention span, higher productivity, and better overall health. Play is essential to the development of children because it contributes to their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being. The SHAC continues to recommend that all elementary students are offered a recess at least once a day and that a balance of structured and unstructured activities be provided to benefit the child in optimal child development. The SHAC highly encourages campuses to follow the AISD Wellness Plan that states, "the district will prohibit the use of physical activity as a form of discipline or punishment and ensure that physical education will not be withheld as a form of punishment."
- Thank you to the School Board bringing sexuality education back into the curriculum in the 2017-2018 school year. The recommendation from the SHAC in the 2016-2017 school year was to provide an "abstinence-plus" sexual education to the curriculum. We urge AISD to further enhance the program that was added during the 2017-2018 school year to further emphasize "abstinence-plus." Providing information on condoms and other forms of contraception and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STDs) is key knowledge that all students need. An "abstinence-plus" curriculum, which still encourages abstinence but also discusses accurate information on other pregnancy prevention methods and sexually transmitted diseases, would provide a "real", meaningful experience. 2017-2018 progress includes:

- Sexuality class was presented through PE classes taught by the PE teachers to students in sixth and eighth grades over 5 days.
- The *Aim for Success* program was presented to the seventh and ninth grade students in an assembly.
  - Seventh grade program focus: sexual activity, abstinence, STDs, reality of contraceptives, emotional scars
  - Ninth grade program focus: technology, sexting, pornography, healthy relationships
- The SHAC would recommend requiring a half semester Health class in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The SHAC members feel very strongly that Health education addresses and integrates education about the content areas (public health, consumer health, environmental healthy, family life, growth and development, nutrition, personal and sexual health, prevention and control of disease through immunizations, safety and accident prevention, and substance use and abuse) at developmentally appropriate ages. For young people today, entering adulthood with a positive and comprehensive understanding of sexual health and wellness represents a vital base of knowledge and a critical element of any well-rounded education. A required Health class would provide a system for students to fulfill the 2013 Texas “Hands-only CPR” requirement for all graduating seniors.
- The SHAC had serious discussions on the best ways to help students struggling with untreated mental health issues. Many factors were discussed on which students should be screened, what age they should be screened and what they were screened for. All members agreed that mass screenings could uncover mental health problems that schools lack resources to treat, but engaging in efforts to provide mental health screenings in schools is an extremely important initial step in the fight against mental illness and will result in the ability to improve the mental health care of children and families everywhere

Please know that I am available to answer questions and provide information as necessary for your consideration of these recommendations and to assist in providing the information to the Abilene ISD Board of Trustees. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,

Linda Langston, RN

Director of Health Services