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Tahlequah School Board Passes Improvements to Wellness Policy

The Board adopted additions to their wellness policy to improve the health of students and staff per the recommendations of Elevate Student Health.

TAHLEQUAH, OKLAHOMA (June 20, 2023) – On Tuesday, the Tahlequah School Board passed improvements to their district wellness policy, a move that will impact the health of almost 3,500 students in the school district located in Cherokee County.

The policy updates include offering alternate meal services such as second breakfast, incorporating local or regional products into the school meal program and providing physical activity breaks in the classroom.

Tahlequah High School students participating in [Elevate Student Health](#) recommended updates to the district's wellness policy based on evidence for what elements would have the greatest impact on youth and staff health.

Elevate Student Health is funded by the [Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust](#) (TSET) through the [Youth Action for Health Leadership](#) (Y AHL) program.

Arianna Santana, an incoming Senior at Keys High School, spoke about why improving wellness policies is important to her.

"It's important to me to speak out about our schools' wellness policies because we are still young and it has such a direct impact on our future lives and health. As students, we have to speak up for ourselves and the well-being of our peers," Santana said.

Most children consume as much as half of their daily calories at school, so schools have a tremendous opportunity to improve the health of their students. Elevate Student Health partners with districts across the state to improve their wellness policies through greater access to nutritious foods, increased physical activity and more opportunities to drink water throughout the day.

Data from 2020 showed Oklahomans 10-17 years old experience obesity at 18.7%, one of the highest rates of childhood obesity in the nation. While weight does not equal health, children with obesity are more likely to develop chronic health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes and mental health conditions.

Physical inactivity and poor nutrition are two of the greatest behavioral risk factors for obesity. Only 26.1% of Oklahoma high school students are physically active for 60 minutes per day, while 22.3% of students drink one or more sodas each day.

DeAnn Mashburn, Tahlequah Assistant Superintendent, was ecstatic. “We update our policies and review them every year because we care about our students. We know that we aren’t just teaching them Math, Science and Social Studies; we are teaching the whole child. Their health is very, very important to how they will perform academically, so that’s why every year we try to evaluate our policies and do best practices. We love this partnership.”

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Elevate Student Health is an initiative working to improve the health of Oklahoma youth through comprehensive physical activity and nutrition policies in schools. It is funded by the Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET). For more information, visit www.ElevateStudentHealth.com.

Youth Action for Health Leadership (Y AHL), a program of the Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET), is a statewide youth-led initiative that partners with schools and organizations to make meaningful and measurable impact on Oklahoma by promoting healthy behaviors. For more information, visit yahlok.org.

The Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET) serves as a partner and bridge builder for organizations shaping a healthier future for all Oklahomans. TSET provides leadership at the intersections of health by working with local coalitions and initiatives across the state, cultivating innovative and life-changing research and working across public and private sectors to develop, support, implement and evaluate creative strategies to take advantage of emerging opportunities to improve the public’s health. TSET – Better Lives Through Better Health. To learn more, go to oklahoma.gov/TSET.