

# The Role of School Wellness in Creating High-Performing Schools

## Action for Healthy Kids Interactive Web Forum

April 27, 2006

### Speaker Biographies

*Includes information on the following participants in the Web Forum:*

- **Gayden Carruth**, AASA Superintendent in Residence for Wellness
- **Mary Louise Cohen**, School Board Member, Bay Shore Union Free School District, NY
- **Roel Gonzalez**, Superintendent, Rio Grande City School District, TX
- **Robert Hagemann**, Principal, McIntosh Middle School, Sarasota, FL
- **Alicia Moag-Stahberg**, Executive Director, Action for Healthy Kids
- **Thomas Payzant**, Superintendent, Boston Public Schools
- **Larry Rifkin**, Moderator
- **Paul G. Vallas**, Chief Executive Officer, School District of Philadelphia
- **Jill Wynns**, School Board Commissioner, San Francisco Unified School District

**Gayden Carruth** is the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) superintendent in residence for wellness where she offers useful direction, proven strategies and compliance advice about developing and implementing wellness policies. A leadership facilitator for the Missouri Council of School Administrators, she serves as an educational consultant in school improvement initiatives and is also a certified McREL Balanced Leadership trainer. Dr. Carruth was a superintendent for 20 years, serving districts in Minnesota and Virginia before becoming the superintendent of the Park Hill School District (MO) from 1994-2005. Prior to becoming a superintendent, Dr. Carruth served as an elementary teacher, principal and supervisor; a school finance researcher; and an assistant superintendent for academic services.

She was named the Missouri Superintendent of the Year in 1999, and she won Administrator of the Year awards from both the Missouri School Public Relations Association and the Platte County Economic Development Council. In 2005, the Missouri National Education Association named her their Horace Mann Friend of Education for individual contributions in the field of education. Dr. Carruth received a national Communicator Award for co-hosting an educational program for KCEN-Public TV, and she was featured in a book entitled "A Power of Her Own" about important Kansas-City-area women.

As a nationally recognized advocate for full federal funding of IDEA, she was asked to serve an unprecedented second term as the chair of the American Association of School

Administrators' federal legislative committee. She has also served as the president or chair of several other groups, including the Suburban School Superintendents USA, Inc., the Greater Kansas City Administrators Association, the UMKC Superintendents' Roundtable and the Metropolitan Schools Study Group. Dr. Carruth received her bachelor's and master's degrees in education from Mississippi College, and her doctorate from the University of Minnesota.

**Mary Louise Cohen** is a member of the Bay Shore Board of Education, serving on the Board for six years, including stints as president and vice president. She is an active member of the Bay Shore Wellness Alliance, a school community organization formed in 1997 and dedicated to increasing awareness and implementing programs to create life long wellness in the schools-community. She serves on the Nutrition Committee of the Alliance, working in partnership with faculty and parents to develop policy and implement changes along with education. The Alliance developed a wellness curriculum, opening the school district's first Wellness Center in 1998. The Wellness Alliance has been nationally recognized with a Magna Award in 2005 for its leadership in this area (<http://www.asbj.com/magna/winners2005/Magna05bayshore.pdf>).

Mrs. Cohen also serves on the Board of *Reform Educational Financing Inequities Today* (REFIT), a consortium of school districts focused on securing equitable distribution of state and federal funding for low wealth, high tax school districts. She recently was awarded the SCOPE School Board Award of Excellence.

Active in her community, Mrs. Cohen serves on the Bay Shore Summit Council's Executive Committee and chairs the Code Enforcement Committee of the organization. The annual summit brings out more than 2,000 residents to discuss issues of community importance. The Summit's theme in 2003 was Wellness, with physical activity a key focus for future health. In 1993, Mrs. Cohen established the non-profit Bay Shore Beautification Society, as part of the Summit organization. She has served on her neighbor board for 14 years, holding the position of president for six years and is currently secretary. She is also the president of Sinai Reform Temple's Parents Council.

Mrs. Cohen's involvement in Bay Shore followed a 12-year career at British Airways that she relinquished to be closer to her children. At British Airways she held various positions, including manager of North American retail sales shops and manager of strategy and planning for marketing distribution. She recently left the position of director of public affairs for St. George's University main campus in Grenada, West Indies, and is currently doing consulting

work. Mrs. Cohen holds a Masters in Political Science and Bachelors in Political Science and Journalism from the University of Kentucky.

**Roel Gonzalez** is superintendent of the Rio Grande City Consolidated Independent School District in Texas. He was born in Simi Valley California, attended Pan American University and graduated with a BS degree in education. Prior to being named superintendent, he served in numerous capacities within the educational environment: junior high school teacher, junior high school principal, high school principal, migrant supervisor, school counselor and central office administrator. Presently, Mr. Gonzalez is attending classes in a doctorate degree program. He enjoys writing poetry, working with stained glass and mosaic and spending time with his wife and two children.

In 2003, when health screenings discovered that nearly half of elementary school boys and more than a third of girls had BMIs above the 85th percentile, the Rio Grande City Consolidated Independent School District began proactively addressing the childhood obesity issue. In addition to providing more nutritious school lunches and providing more opportunities for exercise during the school day, the district has incorporated role models into its wellness initiatives to encourage children to adopt healthier habits. For example, the district hired a physical education teacher from within the community and arranged for a state champion sprinter to organize tournaments and other activities for local children. Also, after identifying students who showed multiple risk factors for diabetes, the district invited families to participate in a nine-week intervention program called DiRReCT, short for Diabetes Risk Reduction via Community-based Telemedicine. The families receive instruction from dietitians and experts in the community are counseled via teleconference by off-site experts.

Mr. Gonzalez and the Rio Grande City Consolidated Independent School District were featured in the January 2, 2005 issue of *The New York Times Magazine* (<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/02/magazine/02OBESITY.html?ex=1262408400&en=f409e2bc0dc634d6&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt>).

**Robert Hagemann** has been the principal of McIntosh Middle School, Sarasota, Florida, for 13 years. He has served as a classroom educator in Oklahoma, Ohio, Illinois and Florida and also as a school-based administrator in Illinois and Florida. He worked with the State of Florida Coordinated School Health Program grant from 1997 – 2001, and joined the Florida School

Health and Education Consortium in 2002. In 2002, he was named an Action for Healthy Kids "Healthy School Hero," and in 2005 was part of the National Middle School Association Executive Panel on School Health Platform. Hagemann has presented on the conference circle and is a keynote speaker as requested for Florida conferences. A member of the Florida School Health Advisory Council for Sarasota County Public Schools, he was named Florida Administrator of the Year for 2004.

Hagemann's activities include implementation of a mobile Eagle Breakfast Café on campus, a Pre-JROTC Leadership Corps, JFCS-MARC diversion service, a campus Fit for Life facility, modified lunch menu, revision to the exclusive contract with a national beverage/food vendor and testimony. Hagemann's school has designed programs to challenge behaviors and outcomes that put youth at educational, social and physical risk using research, teamwork and local assets. During a three-year evaluation based on student performance, vital statistics and review by the Florida Department of Education, the McIntosh Middle School/Coordinated School Health Program pilot contributed to the school's Five Star – Grade A status in the State of Florida 2000 – 2002. Hagemann received his B.S. from the University of Tulsa, Oklahoma and his M.Ed. from Ohio University, Athens.

**Alicia Moag-Stahlberg** is the executive director of Action for Healthy Kids (AFHK), a national, non-profit organization addressing the epidemic of overweight, undernourished and sedentary youth by focusing on changes at school. AFHK is a public-private partnership of more than 50 national organizations and government agencies representing education, health, fitness and nutrition, which support and accelerate the efforts of 51 AFHK State Teams (including all states and the District of Columbia) made up of thousands of volunteers. Former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher is the founding chair of AFHK, which was launched at the 2002 Healthy School Summit in Washington, D.C. AFHK was created in response to the Surgeon General's *Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*, which identified the school environment as one of five key sites of change.

Ms. Moag-Stahlberg is a nationally recognized authority in the field of nutrition and communications. Her career is a combination of experience in preventive medicine research and the field of communications. Prior to forming Action for Healthy Kids, she led a consulting practice with expertise in strategic planning, public relations, marketing, constituency building and issues management. Her work in the communications field has had an emphasis on food, agriculture, nutrition and health. Past experiences included work with companies such as

Monsanto, Quaker Oats, Kraft General Foods and Continental Baking Company. Ms. Moag-Stahlberg serves as an adjunct clinical instructor at Northwestern University Medical School's Department of Preventive Medicine, after spending 10 years as a research nutritionist in that department. Ms. Moag-Stahlberg earned her bachelor's and master's in science and medical dietetics from the University of Illinois-Chicago, and is a licensed and registered dietitian. She is a mother of two teens and passionate about children, nutrition and physical activity.

**Thomas W. Payzant** began serving as superintendent of the Boston Public Schools on October 1995. In *Focus on Children*, a comprehensive plan approved by the Boston School Committee in July 1996, Dr. Payzant established his blueprint for educational reform in Boston. Since then, Boston has instituted new curricula in all subjects, launched a major remediation effort to raise the educational skills of all students to high standards, and established an office focused solely on engaging families and the community in their children's education. In addition, with the support of the business community and philanthropic foundations, Boston's high school renewal effort has resulted in smaller, theme-based high schools that ensure more individualized attention. With the leadership of the Boston School Committee, Dr. Payzant has overseen a multi-pronged effort to close the achievement gap by focusing on improving curriculum, instruction and relationships.

Dr. Payzant came to Boston after serving as assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education with the United States Department of Education. He has served as superintendent in four communities prior to Boston, including his first in Springfield Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, where he was appointed superintendent at the age of 28; and subsequently, in Eugene, Oregon; Oklahoma City; and the San Diego Unified School District, where he served for 11 years prior to his appointment by President Clinton.

Dr. Payzant received his bachelor's degree from Williams College and his doctorate in education from Harvard. In 1998, Dr. Payzant was named Massachusetts Superintendent of the Year and was one of four national finalists for Superintendent of the Year. In 2004, the Council of the Great City Schools presented Dr. Payzant with the Richard R. Green Award for Excellence in Urban Education. In 2005, *Governing Magazine* named Dr. Payzant as one of eight "Public Officials of the Year." He has written numerous journal articles, reviews and chapters for books on education.

**Larry Rifkin** has more than 20 years' experience in public broadcasting in both television and radio. He currently is Senior Program Executive at Connecticut Public Broadcasting and he hosts a radio interview program in Connecticut where he has interviewed, among others, Greg Critser, the author of *Fat Land* (Houghton Mifflin, 2003), and Kelly Brownell of Yale, author of *Food Fight* (McGraw-Hill, 2004). He served as executive producer of the first PBS series on health, exercise and wellness, called "America's Walking." Prior to his career in public broadcasting, Larry was assistant to the state commissioner of education in Connecticut, handling his public relations and speechwriting.

**Paul G. Vallas** was appointed chief executive officer for the School District of Philadelphia in July of 2002. Mr. Vallas is implementing sweeping district-wide reforms in Philadelphia, duplicating many of the approaches that changed Chicago's public school system from one of the worst in the nation to a nationally recognized model for education reform. Vallas's reforms are creating safer schools, better-trained teachers, a unified curriculum, more support for students with special needs and a fiscal plan that improves the financial health of the district. His approach to reforming the district is one of inclusion because parents, staff, community organizations, religious institutions and the City of Philadelphia all deserve a say in their schools.

Mr. Vallas served as the chief executive officer of Chicago Public Schools from 1995 to 2001. During his tenure, Mr. Vallas transformed the nation's third largest school system from what was thought of as "the worst in the country" to "a model for the nation." Mr. Vallas initiated a broad series of educational reforms to reverse the system's persistent failure. He eliminated a projected four-year shortfall of \$1.3 billion within two years and balanced the system's budget each year thereafter. Mr. Vallas fully restored financial stability to the Chicago Public Schools, which earned thirteen bond rating upgrades within a six year period.

During his term, he also implemented an unprecedented capital improvement program by constructing 76 new buildings and renovating more than 500 existing buildings. The program produced a vastly improved learning and teaching environment for the school system. Mr. Vallas streamlined the system's administrative organization by eliminating 1,700 duplicative non-teaching positions and replacing inefficient operations with privately managed services. Mr. Vallas is also credited with ending social promotion, the reorganization of Chicago's high schools, and establishing the largest after-school and summer reading programs in the country.

Between 1996 and 2000, student test scores improved by virtually every academic indicator, including six consecutive years of improved elementary reading scores.

Prior to serving as chief executive for Chicago's public schools, Mr. Vallas was budget director for the City of Chicago. Mr. Vallas also served as revenue director for the City of Chicago, as executive director of the Illinois Economic and Fiscal Commission and as a policy advisor to the Illinois State Senate.

**Jill Wynns**, a board member in the San Francisco County Unified School District in San Francisco County, is the region 5 director of the California School Boards Association and has been serving on the Board of Directors since December 2005.

Wynns has served on the San Francisco Board of Education since 1992. She is a major leader in the urban education community and an expert on California school finance, urban education reform issues and governance, charter schools, privatization of public schools, healthy school food programs and labor-management collaboration. The former director of a children's advocacy organization, Wynns is currently working as a consultant specializing in education issues, community organizing, development and local ballot initiatives. She is a member of the San Francisco team participating in the Public Education Leadership Project, the first-ever joint project of the Harvard Business School and the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

She is on the national board of CUBE, The Council of Urban Boards of Education of the National School Boards Association, is a former president of the Association of California Urban School Districts and was a working group member of the California Master Plan for Education. Wynns serves on the California Student Attendance Review Board and the California Title 1 Committee of Practitioners.

Wynns has authored articles for journals and newsletters, and is a regular workshop presenter at conferences and symposia. She successfully led a community coalition to keep the De Young Museum in Golden Gate Park, and was part of the campaign to rebuild the California Academy of Sciences. She served on CSBA's Delegate Assembly from 1993-94 and 2001-05. Wynns holds a bachelor of arts in humanities from New College at Hofstra University in New York, and studied at Harvard and Wiks Folkhogskola in Balingsta, Sweden.