POLICY & PRACTICE

Mass. to Add a Recovery High School

This fall, the first high school designed to meet the needs of Massachusetts students recovering from addiction will open its doors in Beverly, said Lt. Gov. Kerry Healy. Such schools provide "an opportunity for kids to continue their education in a place that is free from the social pressures that often lead to relapse" of addiction, she said in a statement. To avoid the pressure, students often drop out of school entirely, she added. The Beverly recovery high school will be administered by the Northshore Education Consortium, an organization of 17 school districts. The consortium was awarded $1.5 million from the state over the next 5 years, including $500,000 for start-up costs in the first year and $250,000 in subsequent years. The school will be set up similarly to a charter school, with participating cities responsible for the per-pupil costs. The recovery school movement began in Minnesota in 1989, and about 22 such high schools exist nationwide, according to Laura Nicoll, a spokeswoman for Lt. Gov. Healy. School officials will reach out to residential and outpatient adolescent treatment providers, public schools, and juvenile courts as well as the Department of Youth Services and the Department of Social Services. Plans are underway for additional schools in western Massachusetts and Boston.

Bill Junks Junk Food in Schools

Legislation wending its way through Congress aims to keep junk foods out of U.S. schools. "The bipartisan Child Nutrition Promotion and School Lunch Protection Act would update decades-old federal nutrition standards for snack foods sold in school cafeterias alongside the regular school meals, and would apply those standards everywhere on school grounds, including in vending machines and school stores," according to a statement from Sen. Tom Harkin's (D-Iowa) office. His bill (S. 2592) had six cosponsors; its House of Representatives counterpart (H.R. 5167) was introduced by Rep. Lynn C. Woolsey (D-Calif.). The bill would require the U.S. Department of Agriculture to revise its definition of "food of minimal nutritional value." The bill is supported by the American College of Preventive Medicine, the American Public Health Association, the American Cancer Society, and the American Diabetes Association, among other organizations.

Teen Lawn Mower Injuries Rev Up

Youth aged 15-19 years had the highest rate of hospitalizations from lawn mower injuries, and injuries to those under age 15 years increased substantially from 1996 through 2003, according to a study published in the Annals of Emergency Medicine (2006;[doi:10.1016/j.annemergmed.2006.02.020]). Vanessa Costilla of Rice University, Houston, and Dr. David M. Bishai of Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, looked at data from the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System and found 663,393 lawn mower injuries treated in U.S. emergency departments—an average of 74,000 visits per year. Debris from under the mower hitting a bystander was the most common mechanism for lawn mower injury; in children aged 15 years and younger, burns from hot surfaces and running over an extremity were also frequent mechanisms for injury. Such injuries would be "completely preventable if children could be kept away from lawn mowers" and out of yards when mowers are being used, the authors wrote. "Health professionals and community educators can take an active role in warning parents about the dangers of lawn mowers."

Children's Health Study Funding Cut

A national study on children's health that would return "significant value to the taxpayers" has been slashed from the Bush administration's budget proposal for the National Institutes of Health, according to Rep. Doris O. Matsui (D-Calif.). The National Children's Study, the largest long-term study of human health and development ever conducted in the United States, aims to examine many aspects of children's lives, from family genetics to the social and behavioral environment in which children develop. The study is designed to observe 100,000 children from birth to their 21st birthdays. Pregnant women, couples planning pregnancy, and women of childbearing age not planning pregnancy also are among the subjects. Enrollment of 250 newborns each year for 5 years was set to start in 2007. Some families are already on waiting lists, according to a spokeswoman for Rep. Matsui. "Should the study's research reduce the incidence of childhood injuries, autism, asthma, schizophrenia, and obesity by just 1%—an extremely conservative estimate—the study would pay for itself twofold within 1 year," said the spokeswoman. The Children's Health Act of 2000 authorized the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and a consortium of federal agencies to conduct the study.

—Nancy Nickell