Menstrual Equity for Pennsylvania Students

Guidance for School Entities

I. Act 55 of 2024

On July 11, 2024, the Governor signed Act 55 of 2024, which amended the Public School Code related to funding for school entities providing menstrual products, also known as period products or feminine hygiene products, at no cost to students. Specifically, the legislature amended Section 2502.1 of the School Code to include the following:

> "(b.2) (1) From money appropriated for school health services, the Department of Health, in consultation with the Department of Education, may use up to $3,000,000 to award grants for feminine hygiene products to school entities to be provided to students at no expense."

Research shows that one in three teens have missed class because they did not have access to menstrual products, and one in five students struggled to afford them. This problem disproportionately impacts students of color, students with disabilities, and students experiencing poverty. By enacting this legislation, the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the Governor together recognized that menstrual equity is a critical part of ensuring an adequate and equal education for Pennsylvania students.

Act 55 made these grant funds available to any "school district, charter school, regional charter school, intermediate unit or area career and technical school" proportional to the number of students enrolled. Menstrual products purchased with these grant funds must be provided to students at no cost.

II. Best Practices

To develop and implement an effective strategy to make menstrual products available to students at no cost, school entities can organize their planning around four principles:

> ***Privacy*** includes having safe, private spaces where students can access menstrual products, receive instructions for how to use them, and have access to trash receptacles for private disposal. Students should be able to self-determine when they need to access products, what products they choose, where they can use them, and how to take care of their own bodily functions, with dignity.
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> ***Responsiveness*** means being aware of the needs of the student population and considering how communities learn about, access, and make decisions about health.
>
> ***Access*** means that products, education, and dispensers should be equitably available for all students, including English as a Second Language (ESL) students and students with disabilities. Access also means it is ok for students to take more than one product at a time.
>
> ***Education*** includes addressing the basic human need of understanding how bodies work without shame or stigma.

Availability of Menstrual Products

There are numerous ways to ensure that students have access to products, including but not limited to installing dispensers*, countertop baskets, freestanding storage drawers, or even envelopes attached to walls in bathrooms, locker rooms, classrooms, nursing offices, and other accessible locations in a school building. If a school chooses to install dispensers, it can maximize accessibility to products by ensuring the dispenser:

- Does not require inserting coins or money;
- Is clearly marked as free in at least two languages; and
- Is ADA compliant.

Regardless of how a school makes menstrual products available, it can address both privacy and accessibility by:

- Installing containers at an **accessible height**;
- Offering products in **varied locations**;
- Maintaining student access to products **during bathroom closures**;
- Providing information about product availability in **multiple languages;**
- **Posting a flier** near the dispenser to let students know that the products are free;
- Allowing students to take **more than one product at a time**; and
- Ensuring that products are available **after school hours** for students participating in after school activities.

* For the purposes of this section, a 'dispenser' means any container sufficient to hold menstrual products. It could be installed on a wall or placed on a shelf.

Selecting Menstrual Products

To accommodate students' diverse needs, schools may consider making a variety of menstrual products and brands available, including but not limited to pads, tampons, and panty liners in varying absorbency and size options.

- When determining product availability, school entities can consider having a **mix of single use and reusable** products available in each building.
- **Student input** and **actual product use** can inform selection of product sizes, absorbency, and brands.
- **Single stall trash receptacles** can ensure private and safe disposal of used menstrual products within bathrooms.

School Breaks

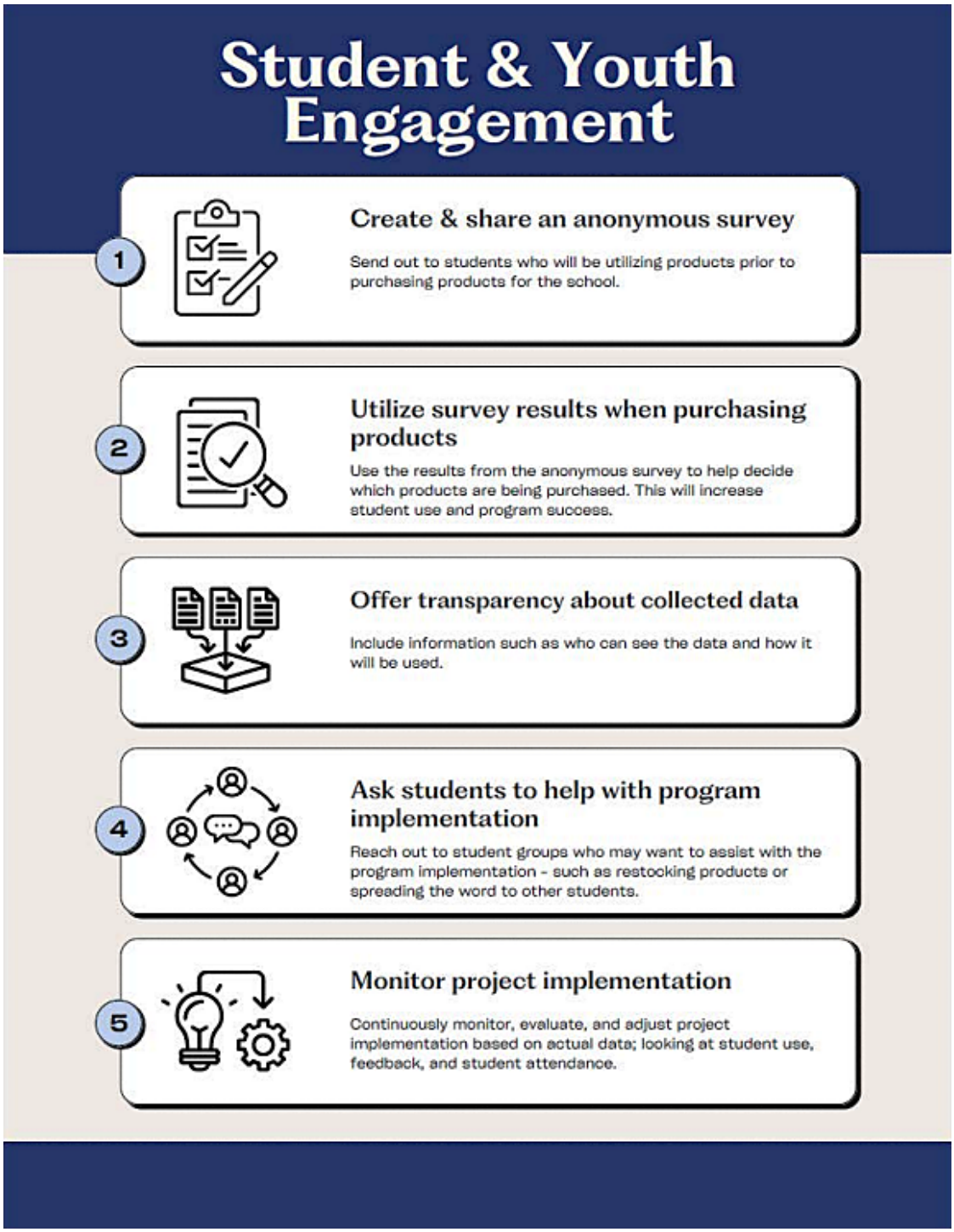
During summer, spring break, or long weekends, school entities can offer students the opportunity to receive period products in a variety of ways, including with regular food distribution programs, take home packs available for pickup, or through an online request form.

III. Education - Menstrual Product Instructions and Safety

School entities can encourage students to practice health habits in the use and disposal of menstrual products by following the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found here: https://www.cdc.gov/hygiene/about/menstrual-hygiene.html.

IV. Staff Engagement & Training – Tips and Resources for Staff Engagement and Training

A variety of school staff can be involved in all phases of project implementation. For example:

- A school nurse and facilities manager could do a walk-through of bathrooms as a district plans placement and product options.
- Custodial staff, school secretaries, and teachers could help with monitoring program successes and challenges and form recommendations for improvements, such as changes in product options and restocking.
- A school nurse could add a poster in the health room and train student groups to serve as program ambassadors.
- School nurses, health teachers, counselors, or principals could provide trainings on the program, accessibility, engaging student input, and other topics based on school program needs.
- Faculty and staff could volunteer to be a point of contact for anyone to approach about this program.

V. Student Engagement