The WELL Campaign, an advocacy effort to improve student health and well-being in New York, partnered with Assemblymember Michael Benedetto and the American Heart Association to host a ‘School Wellness Policy Lunch & Learn.”

Senator Shelley Mayer and Benedetto gave opening remarks. Senators John Liu, Alessandra Biaggi, and Jen Metzger along with assemblymembers Felix Ortiz, John Salka, Al Taylor, Donna Lupardo, Karines Reyes, Victor Pickardo, Michael DenDekker, Walter Mosley, Nader Sayegh, Marianne Buttenschon, and Kimberly Jean-Pierre were also in attendance. The packed event included a panel discussion that focused on the importance of school wellness policy featuring:

• Alicia Evans, MAOL, Rochester City School District parent and Healthy Schools Project coordinator, Common Ground Health
• Amany Messieha Dgheim, MD, Wellness coordinator, New York State PTA, member of Suffern Central School District Board of Education
• Clifford Bird, MS, principal, Abram Lansing Elementary School, Cohoes City School District
• Kelly Moltzen, MPH, RD, program manager, Creating Healthy Schools and Communities Bronx Health REACH, Institute for Family Health
• Pamela Koch, EdD, RD, executive director, Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education and Policy, Research Associate Professor Program in Nutrition, Teachers College Columbia University
• Closet Bird, MS, principal, Abram Lansing Elementary School, Cohoes City School District
• Kelly Moltzen, MPH, RD, program manager, Creating Healthy Schools and Communities Bronx Health REACH, Institute for Family Health
• Pamela Koch, EdD, RD, executive director, Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education and Policy, Research Associate Professor Program in Nutrition, Teachers College Columbia University
• Closet Bird, MS, principal, Abram Lansing Elementary School, Cohoes City School District

Together, we can make a difference for our students and ensure that our schools can implement this important policy,” said Benedetto.

“Communities across New York State have different needs, but one thing is clear -- we all want our students to thrive. They are counting on us to give them the tools and resources to succeed in and out of the classroom. Instituting a state policy on school wellness, and making sure districts have support to bring their wellness policies to life, is an important step in the right direction,” said Evans.

Koch said, “We are at a crucial point for our students and it is imperative that our legislators take action to improve school wellness policy in New York. (The) event featured great conversation and engagement about what we can do to move our state forward and advocate for our students. The WELL Campaign is excited to keep pushing for comprehensive solutions to bring school wellness in New York.”

“In light of the fact that healthier students are better learners, it is imperative that New York State place greater emphasis on implementing policies and practices that create educational environments promoting healthy lifestyles,” said Moltzen. “We are excited to continue our partnership with Assemblymember Michael R. Benedetto and the WELL Campaign in making the health and well-being of all New York school students a priority.”

“As a New York parent advocate, I am excited to see school wellness receive the attention it deserves. All children and youth must get the support they need to live healthy and succeed. I look forward to continuing to work with the WELL Campaign and Assemblymember Benedetto in the fight for ALL students’ well-being,” said Dgheim.

“Given that schools play such a critical role in helping kids learn and practice healthy nutrition and physical activity habits, and the correlation between a healthy school environment and children’s overall health, it makes sense that New York does all it can to strengthen and improve school wellness policies for all districts statewide,” said Caitlin O’Brien, Government Relations director for the American Heart Association. “The AHA looks forward to seeing stronger nutrition standards for school meals, and more frequent, quality physical activity and physical education.”

Initiated by leaders at the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy, Teachers College Columbia University, the WELL Campaign is urging legislators to create a New York state model wellness policy that can be shared with schools; invest $10 million to support target districts with wellness policy implementation; and create an online hub to centralize district wellness policies and reports.

More information can be found at https://www.wellcampaign.org/.