



Building a Relationship with Your School-based Health Center



Whether your district calls it a school-based health center (SBHC), wellness center, adolescent health clinic, health resource center or mobile clinic, they all have one common purpose: to provide students access to care in a location that is safe and convenient. Each of these models represent an important partnership between schools and community health organizations. Successful school-health partnerships share a common goal – to assist young people to thrive in the classroom and beyond.¹ At the foundation of this goal is a strong relationship between the school district and the SBHC. Below are some first steps for school districts to take when building a new relationship or enhancing existing partnerships:

Step 1: Reach Out

Respect the chain of command and be sensitive to the norms in your SBHC around communication and engagement. If you are new to the district it may be helpful to ask the school nurse or principal. Start with the lead physician or nurse practitioner at your SBHC, and then be sure to ask who else should be included when organizing an in-person meeting. It is important to bring together both SBHC direct staff and decision-makers.

Step 2: Ask Questions

Healthcare providers are proud of the important work they do for young people. During your initial meeting with SBHC staff, ask questions about the current health services offered, including sexual health services. Use this opportunity to find out more about the SBHC staff's interest areas, and where they feel improvements could be made.

Step 3: Educate About Your Efforts

When starting a relationship with your SBHC, you may need to provide information and education about the focus of the PS18-1807 cooperative agreement and the value of enhancing sexual health services in your district. It is helpful to start thinking about how you frame the work you're doing or what you would like to accomplish together:

- ⇒ Why does this work matter, both in general and to the SBHC?
- ⇒ How does this work connect with other issues that are important to your SBHC and your community?
- ⇒ It may be helpful to develop a 'pitch' you can use during your first meeting with your SBHC.

To focus your message during your pitch, think about including the following components:

- The school-based health center cares about this work with adolescent reproductive health services because..
- This cooperative agreement gives us the opportunity to.. *(describe the benefit or impact of PS18-1807)*...
- The SBHC can help by...
- Additional information that is relevant to the SBHC...

The PS18-1807 Program Guidance² may also help you identify key messages to include in your 'pitch'.

Success Story: Tips from Portland Public Schools

Portland Public Schools have developed a strong relationship with several of the SBHCs within their district. Portland's Program Manager, Lexie Zimbelman, was gracious enough to share some quick tips that worked well in Portland:

Meet in person!

When starting to build the relationship, try and meet the entire team and one-on-one. It may take time to get in the room with the right person (i.e. key decision-maker), but it is important to explain the goals of the cooperative agreement and share your work plan

Go to them!

Do not make the SBHC staff come to you if you want to meet and get to know them. This will also give you an opportunity to get familiar with the SBHC.

Ask how you can help!

SBHC staff do not like being told what they need to do. Ask the staff where they could use more support and how they think you can help them meet that need.

Meet regularly!

Rome wasn't built in a day. In order to move the relationship with your school-based health center forward try to schedule regular meetings. Monthly or quarterly may be a good place to start.

Additional resource: The School-Based Health Alliance is a national non-profit, membership organization committed to advancing the school-based health care field through programmatic, technical assistance, consulting and advocacy work. Learn more at www.sbh4all.org.

A final thought to keep in mind when approaching your SBHC, "People support what they helped create."

Questions? Contact Gretchen Niemann, Program Manager for Adolescent Sexual Health Initiatives, at GNiemann@aap.org

References

¹School-based health care: where health and education intersect. School-Based Health Alliance. <https://www.sbh4all.org/school-health-care/aboutsbhcs/>. Accessed March 28, 2019.

²Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *PS18-1807 program guidance: Guidance for school-based HIV/STD Prevention (component 2) recipients of PS18-1807*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2019.

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