

Providing School Health Services to Promote Student Success: What School Administrators Can Do

How Does Health Impact Student Success?

The number of students with health conditions has increased significantly. One in four children now has a chronic condition such as asthma, diabetes, obesity, or a learning or behavioral disability¹. Studies have demonstrated that these conditions can impede academic success if not managed properly.

- Children with asthma missed 13.8 million school days in 2013²
- Type 1 diabetes is associated with lower academic outcomes and with student absenteeism³
- Adolescents with overweight and obesity take 36% more sick days per year than adolescents with a lower BMI⁴
- 23% of children age 2-11 have untreated tooth decay⁵, with 51 million school hours missed each year due to dental problems⁶

Many students with health conditions need support in order to be present and engaged in school. By providing effective health services, school districts can minimize the impact of health conditions on learning.

School Health Services

Definition: ***Services provided by the school district to assess, protect, and promote student health. School nurses, physicians, and other medical professionals typically deliver these services.***

Key services include:

- Management of chronic conditions | Example: Tracking blood sugar levels and administering insulin for students with diabetes
- Management of acute conditions | Example: Determining whether an ill student can safely return to class
- Preventive services | Example: Conducting vision and hearing screening; providing immunizations
- Emergency care | Example: Administering CPR and first aid for students or staff
- Health promotion | Example: Advising on strategies to prevent the spread of contagious illness such as flu
- Counseling and health education | Example: Teaching students to better manage their asthma
- Referrals and care coordination | Example: Contacting parents and doctors of students with frequent health-related absences to improve management of the child's condition

School nurses are the backbone of health services in the school, but should not be the sole source of care for a student. As one component of a larger healthcare system, school health services function most effectively when linked with partners such as the public health department and community physicians.

¹Van Cleave J, Gortmaker SL, Perrin JM. Dynamics of obesity and chronic health conditions among children and youth. *JAMA*. 2011;303:623-630

²Asthma-related Missed School Days among Children aged 5-17 years. Center for Disease Control and Prevention Web site. http://www.cdc.gov/asthma/asthma_stats/default.htm. Updated October 5, 2015. Accessed February 2, 2016

³Taras H, Potts-Datema W. Chronic health conditions and student performance at school. *J Sch Health*. 2005;75(7):255-66

⁴Pan L, Sherry B, Park S, Blanck HM. The association of obesity and school absenteeism attributed to illness or injury among adolescents in the United States, 2009. *J Adolesc Health Off Publ Soc Adolesc Med*. Elsevier Inc. 2013;52(1):64-9

⁵Dental Caries (Tooth Decay) in Children (Age 2 to 11). National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research Web site. <http://nidcr.nih.gov/DataStatistics/FindDataByTopic/DentalCaries/DentalCariesChildren2to11.htm>. Updated May 28, 2014. Accessed February 2, 2016

⁶U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health; 2000

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How Can Administrators Support School Health Services?

Advocate for a school nurse in every building. A licensed school nurse plays a key role in addressing health issues in the school setting by providing direct care and coordinating among families, healthcare providers, and the school.

Support the development of health services policies and protocols to ensure consistent service provision and protection against liability.

Designate a health services coordinator. A health services coordinator with dedicated administrative time is able to:

- Ensure the district maintains up-to-date policies and protocols
- Supervise staff in carrying out these policies and protocols
- Oversee the collection and analysis of program data

Engage a physician consultant (volunteer or paid). Physician consultants can:

- Consult on challenging health issues
- Guide the development of health policies and protocols
- Communicate with parents and staff regarding difficult or controversial health topics
- Advise on, and help oversee, school health services staffing and systems

Partner with your local or state public health department. Health departments can:

- Link schools to health resources, social services, and benefit programs
- Advise on health assessments
- Provide direct services such as immunizations, physicals, health screenings, and health education
- Communicate with parents and staff regarding difficult or controversial health topics
- Guide the development of health policies and protocols
- Help to collect and analyze data to assess needs and evaluate activities

Recognize the health professionals in your school district as integral members of the educational team. Include school nurses on IEP, 504, attendance, and student intervention teams.

Schedule time for training. Allow school health professionals time for their own professional development as well as for providing education and training on health issues to other school staff.

“We see the need for strong school health services and we know that health is one of the greatest determinant factors in our students’ academic success.”

~ Carlton D Jenkins, PhD
Superintendent
Robbinsdale Area Schools, MN