

# Center for School, Health and Education

AT THE  
American  
Public Health  
Association



## About School-Based Health Care

Educational success starts with healthy learners, and students who complete high school are more likely to have a lifetime of better health and economic opportunities. School-based health care gives elementary, middle school and high school students access to health and wellness in the place where they spend so much time—the school.

School-based health centers boost educational success and prevent dropout through two vital pathways:

- **Keeping students healthy and ready to learn:** Like doctors' offices in the schools, they provide critical services, without concern for students' ability to pay, right in the school, where young people already are. Care may include screenings, sports physicals, immunizations, diagnoses and treatment of illness and injury, management of chronic diseases, counseling on issues such as bullying, and education on pregnancy prevention, nutrition and the dangers of tobacco and alcohol.
- **Reducing social barriers to educational success:** They are uniquely situated to identify and address social barriers to both school completion and health through school-wide programs and policies on violence, bullying, hunger, poverty, drug use, teen pregnancy and other social issues that affect students' ability to learn and thrive.

### Custom-Built to Meet Students' Needs

School-based health centers may vary based on community need and resources, ranging from full on-site clinics, to off-site school-linked health centers that serve multiple schools, to mobile health centers that rotate from school to school. They work in cooperation to become an integral part of the school, and meet students' needs through a multidisciplinary team of providers including nurse practitioners, registered nurses, physician assistants, social workers, physicians, alcohol and drug counselors, and other health professionals. Some even offer dental care.

### The Need for Expanded School-Based Health Care

More than 1,900 school-based health centers serve nearly two million children and teens across the country. However, there is an urgent need to expand and strengthen the work of school-based health centers.

More than 8.3 million children and teens do not have access to quality health care due to financial access and cultural barriers, and one-third of students drop out of school before graduation, often due to socially determined issues.<sup>1,2</sup> These rates are higher in communities experiencing lower socioeconomic status and in minority racial and ethnic groups, where students are more likely to have limited access to health care for a variety of reasons. School-based health centers have the capacity to impact a broad range of factors, including school climate which can derail students from educational success, to programs and policies that influence every student, especially the most vulnerable.

FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
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## School-Based Health Care Has a Proven Track Record

### Keeping students healthy and ready to learn

- African American male school-based health center users were three times more likely to stay in school than their peers who did not use the clinic.<sup>3</sup>
- School-based health center use is associated with grade point average (GPA) and attendance gains.<sup>4</sup>
- Schools with school-based health centers had significantly fewer early dismissals.<sup>5</sup>
- High school age school-based health center users had a 50% decrease in absenteeism and 25% decrease in tardiness.<sup>6</sup>
- Students without access to a school-based health center lose three times as much seat time as students enrolled in a center.<sup>7</sup>

*For example:*

Due in large part to the establishment of its school-based health center in 2005, the Bruce Randolph School in Denver improved the academic success of its students and dramatically increased graduation rates to 97% in 2010. Out of the 799 students at Bruce Randolph, 700 students received services in the 2009-10 school year. Of these, 36% were uninsured and 49% were covered by a public health insurance program.<sup>8</sup>

### Reducing social barriers to educational success

- Students, teachers and parents who have a school-based health center rated academic expectations, school engagement, safety, and respect significantly higher than in schools without a center.<sup>9</sup>
- Research shows that the presence of school-based health centers positively impacts the overall school climate and learning environment.<sup>10</sup>

*For example:*

- **Suicide prevention:** With the help of the New Mexico Assembly for School-Based Health Centers and their school-based health center, Native American students in the Laguna-Acoma High School Teen Center created a teen peer-to-peer suicide prevention program and secured funding from the legislature.
- **Physical activity:** Students at the Ingalls Elementary School, a community partner of the Massachusetts Coalition of School-Based Health Centers, secured a new playground area, equipment and a 10-minute increase in recess time. They were inspired and supported by the health club at their school-based health center.
- **Nutrition:** As a result of advocacy and community engagement by Montefiore Medical Center's School Health Program and New York State Coalition for School-Based Health Centers, New York City schools now serve only skim milk.
- **Teen pregnancy prevention:** Teens and parents supported by their local school-based health centers in Elsie Allen High School in Santa Rosa and Oakland Unified School District, both in California, obtained permission from the school board to provide comprehensive reproductive health services to address teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections in their community.

1 Freudenberg, N., & Ruglis, J. (2009). "Reframing School Dropout as a Public Health Issue." *Preventing Chronic Disease: Public Health Research, Practice, and Policy* 2007, Vol. 4, No. 4.

2 W. K. Kellogg Foundation, "School-Based Health Care Policy Program Grantees Make Major Strides," p. 1.

3 McCord, M.T.; Klein, J., Foy, J.M.; Fothergill, K. "School-based clinic use and school performance." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 1993, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 91-98.

4 NASBHC, as cited in Walker, Sarah Cusworth; Kerns, Suzanne E.U.; Lyon, Aaron R.; Bruns, Eric J.; Cosgrove, T.J. "Impact of School-Based Health Center Use on Academic Outcomes." *Journal of Adolescent Health*, March 2010, Vol. 46, No. 3, p. 255.

5 Van Cura, Maureen. "The Relationship Between School-Based Health Centers, Rates of Early Dismissal from School, and Loss of Seat Time." *Journal of School Health*, August 2010, Vol. 80, No. 8, p. 371.

6 NASBHC news release: "School-based health centers keep students healthy and learning," Feb. 1, 2010.

7 Van Cura, p. 371.

8 NASBHC news release.

9 NASBHC news release.

10 Strolin-Goltzman, Jessica. "The Relationship Between School-Based Health Centers and the Learning Environment." *Journal of School Health*, March 2010, Vol. 80, No. 3, p. 157.