

The Benefits of Partnership in School-Based Physical and Mental Health Care

The purpose of this document is to emphasize the benefits of collaborative partnership between schools and districts and health care providers to help meet the physical and mental health care needs of the whole child. These partnerships build upon and complement the invaluable work of Ohio Department of Education licensed school health care providers (e.g., school nurse, school social worker) who may already be employed by a school or district.

NEED FOR SCHOOL-BASED PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

School-based health initiatives help to ensure students are in school, healthy and ready to learn through a school or district's partnerships with health care providers and other community organizations. School-based health initiatives may include primary care, mental and behavioral health care, dental, and vision services, among others. In alignment with *Each Child, Our Future*, Ohio is helping to support schools and districts begin new, or augment existing, school-based physical and mental health partnerships to meet the needs of the whole child.

Regular school attendance positively impacts a student's academic achievement and outcomes. Yet, nearly one in six Ohio students, or 16.4 percent, are chronically absent, defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year for any reason, including excused absences. Students who regularly attend school often earn higher grades, score higher on standardized tests and are more likely to graduate.

Nonacademic challenges, such as physical health and mental health issues, can create major barriers to regular attendance. By providing quality health care services in or near a school or campus, school-based health efforts minimize students' time out of class for care, minimize parents' or caregivers' time away from work for appointments and help to avoid unnecessary emergency room visits. These initiatives have shown a significant effect on absenteeism, tardiness, early dismissal and student engagement in the classroom.

SCHOOL-BASED PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS

Schools are ideal environments for addressing the health, social, emotional, and behavioral needs of children in the interest of advancing learning readiness, but schools and districts cannot support this work alone. Instead, schools and districts can create collaborative partnerships that are mutually beneficial in supporting the needs of the whole child. By working together with partners to achieve a common goal, schools and districts can access needed additional resources like human, organizational and financial capital.

HUMAN CAPITAL BENEFITS

Collaborative partnerships are crucial in school-based health work. While schools and districts may employ their own licensed school health care provider, there may still be the need for referrals to support additional treatment. The Ohio Department of Education licensed school health care provider may remain the first point of care for all students but can provide a warm handoff to a trusted partner clinician in a school-based setting, convenient to the child and caregiver during school hours, as needed.

ORGANIZATIONAL BENEFITS

School-based health initiatives are often well-aligned with the mission and values of providers and organizations working to improve the physical and mental health outcomes of children. In entering school-

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Paolo DeMaria, Superintendent of Public Instruction

based health care partnerships, health care providers can achieve improvements in access to care, patient experience, quality of care, and community connections. Partner clinicians in a school-based setting have increased regular access to patients (likewise, students and families can better connect with clinicians) and see increases in patient adherence to treatment plans. Partner clinicians in a school-based setting can increase rates of early intervention and increase the depth of services provided. All aspects ultimately work toward building and nurturing long-term relationships with students and families.

FINANCIAL BENEFITS

Partnership is key in the financial sustainability of this work for schools and districts. The partner clinician in a school-based setting is most often employed by the partner agency, removing the burden of cost to a school or district for additional qualified providers. Partner clinicians may be reimbursed by private insurers or Medicaid through several mechanisms or by a sliding-scale fee system. This funding structure helps to ensure students' access to health care services is maintained through school-based health partnerships despite any potential changes to school funding.

Schools or districts and providers often work together to secure additional local, state, and federal funding to cover start-up costs, which may include renovations to existing space or the provision of sliding-scale or free services. House Bill 166 of the 133 General Assembly, passed in July 2019, includes Student Wellness and Success funding that can be used by schools or districts alongside partners to support school-based physical and behavioral health care initiatives.

IDENTIFY POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Schools and districts that have formed school-based physical and mental health partnerships commonly partner with community health centers, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC), private provider groups, hospitals and educational service centers, among others. In engaging potential partners, a school or district should determine which can best serve the unique needs of their community. Before entering into school-based health partnerships, providers and schools or districts are encouraged to review student and community data to best assess what services can be provided and sustained in the school-based setting.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

For additional guidance on engaging and partnering with the provider community, including examples of collaborative school-based physical and mental health partnerships in Ohio, please refer to Ohio's [School-Based Health Care Support Toolkit](#). For additional guidance on Student Wellness and Success funding, specifically, please refer to the Department's [Student Wellness and Success webpage](#). For additional guidance on determining which licenses a health care professional must possess when providing health care services in a school environment, please refer to the partner document, *Licensure Considerations for Health Care Professionals*.

Questions may be directed to: Office of Integrated Student Supports
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