



ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT STUDENT WELLNESS

Introduction

Schools and their surrounding communities can play a critical role in supporting student mental health and wellness to develop positive learning environments and enhance academic achievement. Importantly, promoting mental health initiatives in schools is considered a practical step in improving school safety and reducing the risks of violent school incidents.¹ In this brief, Hanover outlines how school districts and community organizations can partner to implement systems and programs that support students' health, wellness, and social-emotional development.

Key Findings

- **Schools are uniquely situated to support the overall physical health and emotional wellbeing of students, along with their educational development.** Supporting students' positive social-emotional development helps schools improve classroom behavior, student social interactions, and overall academic performance. As schools and school districts are increasingly supporting the full development of their students, improving physical and mental health services and school safety measures has become a growing practice.
- **Partnering with community organizations and external services can help schools provide more comprehensive and effective health and wellness services for their students.** Health and wellness partnerships can provide the support services that go beyond the traditional capacity of schools. These partnerships can provide schools with external health and wellness educational programming, or they can help schools set up school-based wellness resources.
- **School-based health centers (SBHCs) are collaborative service models that make the most of school-community partnerships to provide students with comprehensive health and wellness services.** SBHCs bring nurses, physicians, dentists, and mental health professionals into the school building to care for students and their families and provide physicals, preventive care, mental health counseling, make diagnoses, and more.
- **Federal funding opportunities and resources exist to support school and school-community student health and wellness initiatives.** The U.S.

Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Students (OSHS) supports health and wellness initiatives and programs via the Safe and Supportive Schools Group, the Healthy Students Group, and the Center for School Preparedness.

Establishing Community Partnerships

Working to integrate complicated and intricate services and interventions in schools requires effective collaboration between schools, district administrators, the surrounding community, and community organizations.² Building these strong relationships and sharing responsibilities with community partners takes time and trust, but this is a worthwhile effort so that students can have access to the services they need. According to the Center for Mental Health in Schools:

Major processes are required to develop and evolve formal and institutionalized sharing of a wide spectrum of responsibilities and resources.

School-community partnerships can weave together a critical mass of resources and strategies to enhance caring communities that support all youth and their families and enable success at school and beyond.³

To initiate a new community partnership, schools should start by collaborating with partners one project at a time. Once schools and partners build a foundation of trust, the partnership can progress by developing a shared vision for continued work and defining leadership between the school and the partner. To develop school-community partnerships, schools should follow the following steps:



Start small. Before diving into a long-term partnership, start with a project that is small and defined in scope. Small gains at the outset help to build a relationship and trust between the partner and the school.



Develop a shared vision. A shared vision will help partners work together toward mutual success. This vision should align with the community partner's mission, but also consider the students' well-being and academic outcomes.



Define leadership on both sides. To encourage effective communication and collaboration among partners, both parties should agree on who will own the relationship and who can communicate progress and challenges to improve the experience.



Acknowledge the role of your partners as educators. Community partners play an important and active role in the education of students. Acknowledge this role with both your partner and your students. While not teachers in the traditional sense, partners are also serving as educators and should be empowered to share their knowledge and expertise.

Source: Ed Week⁴

Establishing Health and Wellness Community Partnerships

Health and wellness services, particularly mental health services, are critical for students today, as nearly 20 percent of U.S. students are diagnosed with mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders. However, almost half of these students remain untreated. When mental health problems and disorders go untreated, students' education can suffer, they are more prone to substance abuse, and more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system.⁵ Of the students who are being treated for mental illness, most students are treated at school through educational counseling or mental health therapy.⁶ The following figure clarifies the difference between educational counseling and mental health therapy:

Educational Counseling	Mental Health Therapy
- Personal/social skills development	- Diagnosis
- Behavior skills development	- Based upon symptom and behavior change or alleviation of emotional or psychological condition; evidence-based techniques and therapeutic interventions
- Conflict resolution and anger management	- Interventions to address emotional disorder/behavioral disorder
- Support with peer relationships	- Individual/family/group psychotherapy
- Goal setting/decision-making	
- Career guidance and academic development	
- Study skills development	

Source: Technical Assistance Partnership for Child and Family Mental Health⁷

Partnering with community organizations can help schools go beyond their own capacity of health, safety, and wellness program offerings to meet a broader range of students' needs.⁸ Wellness partnerships can bring external services on school sites such as mental health counseling, substance abuse counseling, health and safety educational programming, and even primary medical care and dental/oral health care.

The Coalition for Community Schools and the National Association of School Psychologists developed the following structural elements of effective school-community partnerships for addressing mental and physical health and overall student wellness: leadership, evaluation, and function.

Leadership

- A leadership team composed of school and community stakeholders
- A designated person located at the school to lead the coordination of the partnerships
- Clear expectations, shared accountability, and delineation of roles and responsibilities for school personnel and community providers
- Ongoing comprehensive professional development for all school leaders, staff, and community partners

Evaluation

- Assets and needs assessment to address student health and wellness
- Specific short- and long-term goals based on the identified need
- Regular evaluation of effectiveness through a variety of measures

Function

- High-quality health and wellness services that leverage school and community resources
- Specialized instructional support personnel and community service providers each have knowledge and skills critical to improving student and school outcomes
- A detailed plan for long-term sustainability of the partnership across multiple school and fiscal years, ideally with a diversified funding stream
- Communications plan to share updates

Source: The Coalition for Community Schools and the National Association of School Psychologists⁹

School-community health and wellness partnerships should function to accurately and comprehensively treat the needs of all students via three tiers of support service:¹⁰

- **Universal:** Mental health promotion activities for all students
- **Selective:** Prevention services for students identified as at-risk for a mental health problem

- **Indicated:** Services for students who already show signs of a mental health problem

School-community partnerships should use these three tiers of support to address the skills associated with adolescent development and violence prevention. Wellness programs should help youth become adept in five core competencies, and thus enhance socialization, improve academic achievement, and limit violent behaviors.¹¹ The five skills for healthy youth development are as follows:

Core Competency:	Related Terms:
1 Positive Identity	Positive self-concept, hopefulness, future goals
2 Personal Agency	Self-efficacy, effective coping, locus of control, attributional style
3 Self-Regulation	Affective, behavioral, and cognitive self-regulation; impulse control
4 Social Relationship Skills	Social problem-solving skills, empathy, conflict resolution, capacity for intimacy
5 Prosocial System of Belief	Attitudes, norms, values, moral engagement

Source: Guerra and Williams¹²






School-Based Health Centers

School-based health centers (SBHCs) are iterations of school-community partnerships aimed at providing students with comprehensive healthcare and mental health treatment at school not only to achieve health equity, but also to help students thrive in and out of the classroom. According to the School-Based Health Alliance:

School-based health care is a powerful tool for achieving health equity among children and adolescents who unjustly experience disparities in outcomes simply because of their race, ethnicity, or family income...

...Onsite health care professionals collaborate with schools to address the broad range of concerns and adverse experiences that affect students' healthy development.¹³

SBHCs can look different across schools, districts, and states, but feature the same common characteristics. Generally, SBHCs:

-  Provide quality, comprehensive health care services that help students succeed in school and life;
-  Are located in or near a school facility and open during school hours;
-  Are organized through school, community, and health provider relationships;
-  Are staffed by qualified health care professionals; and
-  Are focused on the prevention, early identification, and treatment of medical and behavioral concerns that can interfere with a student's learning.

Source: School-Based Health Alliance¹⁴

In providing comprehensive health care to students, SBHCs often house teams of professionals from multiple different medical disciplines. This includes physicians and nurses; dentists and dental hygienists; and psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers.¹⁵ These "multidisciplinary teams" treat students within the school building and provide the following services:



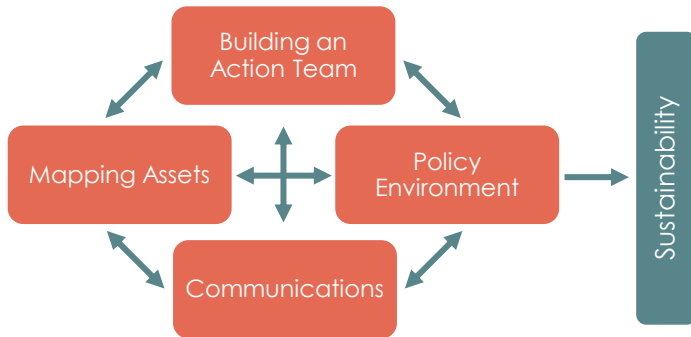
Source: National Association of Social Workers¹⁶

The partnership between schools and health care providers relies on the assumption that holistic education that supports all needs of all students requires strategic collaboration among a diverse group of community partners and professionals. By integrating multiple systems of student wellness (education, physical health, mental health, safety), school-community wellness partnerships can ultimately achieve functioning SBHCs at their neighborhood schools.¹⁷

Creating School-Based Health Centers

Schools and their surrounding communities must work together to start and sustain fully-functioning SBHCs. The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools developed a framework for effectively collaborating on complex initiatives such as SBHCs.¹⁸

The framework for SBHC partnerships, like the structural elements of school-community partnerships, involves a comprehensive team of stakeholders, asset mapping, and strong communications strategies. Additionally, the framework for SBHC partnerships requires up-to-date knowledge on the policies that may influence the function of the SBHC. This framework helps school-community partnerships ensure SBHCs can be sustainable and functional.¹⁹



Source: *The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools*²⁰

The four strategies of SBHC partnership and sustainability, as pictured above, are defined as follows:

Building an Action Team
Prioritizes networking and building/strengthening relationships with community agencies, school leaders, elected officials, appointed policy leaders and decision-makers at local and state levels, and with well-connected citizens and professionals. Includes community members who share your goals, have political clout, and can help navigate policies and procedures.
Mapping Assets
Builds on strengths of effective school-owned and community-based programs currently in place in your locality or state. Mapping these resources builds relationships among partners, identifies existing programs and resources, and uncovers potential gaps and opportunities for improvement.
Connecting with the Policy Environment
Requires keeping abreast of the policy environment. Understanding the policies that impact your initiative and having relationships with the people who can influence or change those policies is crucial to enacting systems change.
Communications
Emphasizes positive messages that are framed to generate support from strategically targeted audiences, both the broader public interest and the narrower professional interests, and focuses on existing community assets while calling for specific actions.

Source: *The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools*²¹

Using these strategies, school-community partnerships can work to create and sustain SBHCs. Through this work, school-community partnerships should ensure their SBHCs fulfill the following core competencies, set forth by the School-Based Health Alliance:

- Access**
 - The SBHC assures students' access to health care and support services to help them thrive.
- Student-Focus**
 - The SBHC team and services are organized explicitly around relevant health issues that affect student well-being and academic success.
- School Integration**
 - The SBHC, although governed and administered separately from the school, integrates into the education and environment to support the school's mission of student success.
- Accountability**
 - The SBHC routinely evaluates its performance against accepted standards of quality to achieve optimal outcomes for students.
- School Wellness**
 - The SBHC promotes a culture of health across the entire school community.
- Systems Coordination**
 - The SBHC coordinates across relevant systems of care that share in the well-being of its patients.
- Sustainability**
 - The SBHC employs sound management practices to ensure a sustainable business.

Source: *The School-Based Health Alliance*²²

[**Click here for more information on the School-Based Health Alliance's Core Competencies for School-Based Health Centers**](#)

Challenges in Creating School-Based Health Centers

There are several challenges related to the implementation of SBHCs in schools. First, and most important, obtaining and maintaining appropriate **funding** can be an overwhelming challenge for school-community partnerships in developing SBHCs. Funding schedules of certain grants may not fit within school districts' operational procedures.²³ Funding is crucial in helping schools set up all the resources required for SBHCs (e.g., equipment, personnel, space).²⁴

Next, it can be difficult to navigate the sometimes-**competing interests** of schools and their community partners.²⁵ According to the California School-Based Health Alliance, lack of funding and resources can "compound competing agendas between schools, county agencies, and community-based providers."²⁶ Different stakeholders and partners in health and wellness will separately target the same students and

student needs, thus, directing limited resources to these competing interests can be a significant challenge.²⁷

Finally, generating community-wide buy-in for school innovation can be uncomfortable for some stakeholders who must now re-think their roles in the community.²⁸ **Community-wide collaboration** on SBHCs requires the coordination of cross-disciplinary skills; further, stakeholders must be able to participate in this coordinated cross-disciplinary collaboration. This can be challenging for stakeholders who have never had to consider new applications of their roles in the school community—for example: “teachers are generally not experts on mental health and therapists are not educators working in the classroom,” but to effectively implement SBHCs, these professionals must begin to consider themselves as collaborating partners in a larger mission.²⁹

National School Wellness Initiatives

The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Healthy Students (OSHS) supports health and wellness initiatives and programs through financial assistance and public policy. The following three units are housed under the OSHS, and function to help districts and schools in creating and maintaining healthy, safe, and supportive environments for students.

Safe and Supportive Schools Group

- Administers Title IV, Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) authorized by ESEA, as amended, and other programs related to developing and maintaining safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools.
- In particular, this Group administers the Safe and Supportive Schools (S3) grant program and a number of interagency agreements with a focus on but not limited to: bullying, school recovery research, and data collection.
- This group also administers grant programs that are intended to ensure that youth make successful transitions to school or employment once they are released from adult institutions and does not cause these children to be left behind in school.

Healthy Students Group

- Administers programs that promote violence prevention, alcohol abuse prevention, homelessness, and the health and well-being of students and families as outlined in Title IV and V, Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) authorized by the ESEA, as amended, and other programs that address the needs of homeless children to help them enroll in school, attend regularly, and achieve success.
- Programs authorized under this legislation provide financial assistance for activities that promote the health and well-being of students in elementary and secondary schools, and institutions of higher education.
- Activities may be carried out by local educational agencies and by other public and private nonprofit organizations.

Center for School Preparedness (“The Center”)

- Administers programs that promote the ability of schools to prepare for and respond to crisis and disasters (natural and man-made).
- The Center also has responsibility for addressing issues related to homeland security.
- The Center is responsible for:
 - Project SERV (School Emergency Response to Violence)
 - Readiness Emergency Management for Schools
 - Homeland Security Activities
 - Disaster Response Coordinated with FEMA and DHS
- In addition to the above activities, the Center is responsible for maintaining close contact with school security police chiefs, School Resource Officers, and emergency first responders.

Source: U.S. Department of Education³⁰

Project Evaluation Form

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Endnotes

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- ²⁰ Figure adapted from Ibid.
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