

Taking Action: Building Capacity

Section Five

Taking action to address health-related chronic absenteeism can have a powerful impact on students' academic success and well-being for a lifetime.

This document focuses on preparing educators—particularly school district decision-makers—with knowledge and practical guidance for creating such meaningful change.

This section focuses on building the capacity of the school and key partners to effectively address chronic absenteeism

To access the full toolkit, please visit:
healthyschoolscampaign.org/chronic-absenteeism

Building Capacity

Once the decision has been made to implement an effort to reduce chronic absenteeism, it is critical to generate school-wide support for the effort and build the capacity of the school and key partners to engage in this work. Accessing existing resources, ensuring adequate training and supporting the sustainability of your work are key steps toward building the capacity of your school district to implement effective interventions.

Key Partners and Resources

There are many partners and resources available to support school staff in understanding the health-related causes of chronic absenteeism and in implementing interventions to address the root causes in a given community. These include the following:

Specialized instructional support personnel:

Specialized instructional support personnel include school nurses, school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists and other qualified professional personnel such as speech language pathologists involved in providing services to meet student needs. These individuals can play a key role in helping school staff and school administrators understand the health issues impacting students in a district and/or school and can also play a key role in delivering evidence-based programs and services to meet those needs. Given that not every school has access to these individuals, increasing access to these individuals is a key strategy for addressing the health-related causes of chronic absenteeism.

School-based health centers and community clinics:

School-based health centers can also play a critical role in meeting student health needs and in helping schools understand the leading health issues impacting students in a community. In addition to school-based health centers, community clinics can also play this role and help schools both understand student health needs and address those needs.

Public health agencies: Local public health agencies can both share data with school districts to help them understand their student health needs and

implement effective interventions to address those needs. Contacting your local public health agency to discuss chronic absenteeism and explore strategies for improving student health can serve as a key strategy for bringing additional resources and support to schoolwide efforts to address chronic absenteeism.

Local hospitals and health providers: Local hospitals and health providers can also provide training and support to school districts as they work to understand student health issues. This can include sharing community health needs assessments and working with school staff to understand their implications for their student body and supporting the delivery of programming to meet the needs identified. Local health providers can also play an important role in asking parents and students about attendance and emphasizing the importance of attending school every day.

Community organizations: Community organizations, including local chapters of United Way, children's advocacy organizations and social justice organizations, can offer additional resources and support for efforts to address chronic absenteeism. These organizations can assist with program implementation and providing targeted support to high need populations.

State education agencies: Under the new federal education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states are required to include chronic absenteeism in their state report cards which are submitted to the U.S. Department of Education. As this new law is implemented (states will be required to comply with the new law at the start of the 2017-2018 school year), it can be expected that states will have guidance and resources to support school districts in addressing chronic absenteeism and reducing chronic absenteeism across their state. In addition, a number of states, including California, Utah and Illinois, have existing statewide initiatives to address chronic absenteeism. Contact your state education agency to learn more about what is taking place around chronic absenteeism in your state and what resources are available. Additional information regarding state level efforts to address chronic absenteeism is available on the [Attendance Works website](https://www.attendanceworks.org/).

Attendance Works: Attendance Works is a national and state initiative that promotes awareness of the important role school attendance plays in achieving academic success, starting with school entry. Their goal is to ensure that every district in the country not only tracks chronic absence data beginning in kindergarten or earlier, but also partners with families and community agencies to intervene when attendance is a problem for children or particular schools. Attendance Works has published a number of tools to support states and school districts in building the capacity to track chronic absence data and develop effective interventions. These tools and technical assistance resources are [available online](#).

U.S. Department of Education: In October 2015, the U.S. Department of Education launched the Every Student, Every Day initiative to support coordinated community action that addresses the underlying causes of local chronic absenteeism, including student health issues. As a part of this launch, the U.S. Department of Education released its [Community Toolkit to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism](#). More information about the Every Student, Every Day initiative can be found here.

Regional offices of the USEPA and USDA: Regional offices of both the USEPA and USDA can offer extensive resources to school districts on supporting student health and wellness. For example, your regional EPA office can connect you with information regarding how to improve indoor air quality (a key contributor to asthma) and key local partners. In addition, the USDA can connect you with resources regarding meal programs for low-income families, including the school meal program, to address food insecurity which is another health-related cause of chronic absenteeism.

Ensuring Sustainability

Ensuring the sustainability of efforts to address chronic absenteeism is key to their success. Key strategies for supporting sustainability include:

Cross-sector collaboration: The health sector can play an important role in implementing effective interventions and helping school districts meet student health needs and in turn supporting academic achievement. In addition, the health sector stands to benefit from working with schools to support student health and wellness given that research shows delivering health services and programming in schools

Supportive Policy

The conditions that support student health and good attendance do not appear by accident or luck; they develop in the context of policy decisions made at the federal, state and district levels.

The consequences of these policy decisions are not always intentional. In the past decade, for example, a combination of policies prioritizing time spent on academic subjects led schools across the country to eliminate time for recess, with adverse outcomes for students' health and school connectedness.

When policies are being debated and developed, leaders in the education and health sectors can play a powerful role in ensuring that policymakers understand the potential impact of their decisions on student health and learning. Policy is most meaningful when it is informed

by on-the-ground knowledge, and education leaders are well-positioned to share this valuable insight with policymakers.

Healthy Schools Campaign advocates for policy that supports health and education at the national, state and local levels. In partnership with Trust for America's Health, HSC also co-convenes the [National Collaborative on Education and Health](#), which is working to transform the conditions of health in schools across the country and has a key focus on chronic absenteeism.

We invite you to stay informed and lend your voice to the policy dialogue that shapes the conditions for health in our schools. To learn more and sign up to receive updates, visit healthyschoolscampaign.org/subscribe.

is a proven strategy for improving quality of and access to care in addition to reducing health care expenditures. School districts can also partner with additional local sectors including housing, transportation, environment and justice to support this work. Reaching out to local agencies and partners can help ensure cross-sector support for this work and leverage additional resources.

Multi-sector data and accountability systems: An additional strategy for ensuring the sustainability of this work is to support the inclusion of chronic absenteeism data in other sectors' data systems and accountability systems. For example, working with local hospitals to include chronic absenteeism rates in community health needs assessments can play a key role in ensuring hospitals remain committed to this issue and think strategically about how to implement efforts to address this problem. In addition, including rates of chronic absenteeism in public health data sets can increase awareness about the issue and its connection to children's health and build broader support for school district efforts.

Multiple funding sources: School districts and partners can consider how to effectively braid and blend funding to support this work. Braiding diverse streams of funding, including public and private grant programs, can help ensure these efforts are not dependent on a single source of funding, while engaging multiple partners.

Increased access to resources through Medicaid: A series of recent regulatory changes has created new opportunities for accessing Medicaid resources for

school health services, including both physical and mental health services. In the first of these changes, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) changed its regulation to allow Medicaid reimbursement of services recommended by a physician and implemented by providers such as community health workers. In states that choose to implement this new flexibility, Medicaid programs will be able to cover numerous interventions in school settings carried out by non-clinical school personnel including health care aides, asthma educators and other community health workers. Second, CMS removed a barrier known as the free care policy and clarified that health providers can bill Medicaid for services delivered to the general student population in schools. In states that choose to implement this change, Medicaid reimbursement will be available for health services delivered by Medicaid-eligible providers in schools, such as asthma management, immunizations, screenings and acute care. By increasing resources for health care in schools, these changes can increase access to school health services for all students. To learn more about these changes, see [Healthy Schools Campaign's school health services policy guide](https://healthyschoolscampaign.org/school-health-services-policy-guide).

Learn More in the Full Report

This is section five of five in Addressing the Health-Related Causes of Chronic Absenteeism: A Toolkit for Action. To access the other sections, visit: healthyschoolscampaign.org/chronic-absenteeism

About Healthy Schools Campaign

Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC) is dedicated to making schools healthier places where all children can learn and thrive. HSC advocates for children to have access to nutritious school food, physical activity, school health resources, green schoolyards and clean air. HSC has a special focus on the wellness and environmental health issues affecting low-income students of color. We start with a social justice perspective and believe this focus is especially critical in light of the vast health disparities our nation faces. HSC facilitates collaboration

among parents, educators, students and policymakers to help prepare this diverse group of stakeholders to lead change for healthier schools at the school, district, state and national levels.

In partnership with Trust for America's Health, HSC co-convenes the National Collaborative on Education and Health, which is working to transform the conditions of health in schools across the country and has a key focus on chronic absenteeism.

Stay connected!

We invite you to learn more, access resources and lend your voice to the dialogue about healthy schools.

For questions or to discuss this issue, please contact Alex Mays, National Program Director, at alex@healthyschoolscampaign.org.

Learn more and sign up for updates from HSC at healthyschoolscampaign.org.

175 N. Franklin, Suite 300
Chicago, Illinois 60606
(312) 419-1810

 twitter.com/healthyschools

 facebook.com/healthyschools