

CENTER FOR SCHOOL, HEALTH AND EDUCATION

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Dear Champions of Education and Student Success:

Education, often a neglected topic on the campaign trail, came up several times during the first presidential debate. But, like too many conversations about education, this one focused mainly on preserving teachers' jobs and protecting budgets. Those are certainly priorities, but addressing what is vital to keeping students healthy, learning and successful is equally important. We've got to turn up the volume on this part of the story if we're going to reverse the dropout crisis.



Truly supporting students to graduate is about providing comprehensive, student-centered programs that reduce tardiness, absenteeism and dropout. That means reducing teen pregnancy, life stresses, bullying, violence and other education-related health and social challenges that keep students away from school. It means making sure students have access to healthy food and physical activity, to keep their bodies strong and their minds active.

A proven strategy to meet these goals is school-based health care. In addition to providing primary, preventive, and mental health care to students, the 1,900 school-based health centers across the country are in an ideal position to identify and address barriers that prevent students from graduating. Research shows that school-based health centers play an integral role in increasing retention and reducing dropout. If we want to talk about effective education reform, school-based health care must be part of the conversation.

As you make critical decisions about where to cast your vote for president, congress, governor, state legislators, local school boards and other leaders, consider which candidates have strong records of supporting the following priorities. And if you're not sure, ask them.

- Ensuring access to health care, insurance coverage and related services such as mental health, dental health and violence prevention for children and students.
- Supporting the objectives for adolescent health outlined in [Healthy People 2020](#), a set of national health-related goals published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. A leading health indicator is increasing graduation rates, which is directly supported by other objectives such as increasing access to wellness checkups, decreasing absenteeism and decreasing bullying and violence in school.
- Increasing access to nutritious food, especially in school meals. The Back 2 School Campaign, endorsed by the American Public Health Association, supports schools this fall as they implement new school meal standards that increase access to

fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy, and reduce calories, sodium and unhealthy fats.

- Providing access to physical activity in schools and in our communities. Local elected officials can be champions for parks, playgrounds and greenspaces. State leaders can endorse physical education policies. This, in addition to ensuring access to healthier foods, is critical if we are to reverse the current obesity epidemic and related health risks.
- Classifying school-based health centers as “essential care providers” or “primary care medical homes” as states reform their health care systems. This designation will help ensure that school-based health centers expand as a reliable, trusted base of health care for young people—and that they will be covered under state health insurance exchanges and other reforms.
- For congressional leaders, ending sequestration, a set of across-the-board cuts scheduled to take effect Jan. 2, 2013. Sequestration will [cut investments to children by \\$6.4 billion](#) according to the White House Office of Management and Budget. Cuts to education alone would total \$3.2 billion, and there would be deep cuts to other critical programs such as early childhood services, housing, nutrition and child health.

We also invite your organization to adopt increasing graduation rates as one of your priorities and to champion school-based health care as a leading strategy to get there. You’ll join organizations such as the NAACP, which has adopted a resolution to support school-based health centers as a strategy to prevent dropout. Noting that African-American male users of school-based health center were three times more likely to stay in school than their peers who did not use centers, the NAACP resolved to “promote and work with existing organizations, state and local officials, and others to encourage increased funding and implementation of school-based health centers nationwide.” We welcome the opportunity to discuss ways your organization might support this important work.

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to engage the public, lawmakers, the media and partners in support of an educational system that prioritizes student health as a key strategy to preventing dropout. I welcome your input and feedback and look forward to ongoing collaboration.

Sincerely,

Terri D. Wright
Founding Director

For past issues of this Director’s Letter and other information on school-based health care as a proven strategy for dropout prevention, please visit www.schoolbasedhealthcare.org and follow us on Twitter: [@stopdropout](https://twitter.com/stopdropout).