PUBLIC HEALTH PREVENTION IN SCHOOLS: A RESOURCE GUIDE

APHA

AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

For science. For action. For health.

CAUSE I AIN'T GOT A PENCIL
by Joshua T. Dickerson

I woke myself up
Because we ain't got an alarm clock
Dug in the dirty clothes basket,
Cause ain't nobody washed my uniform
Brushed my hair and teeth in the dark,
Cause the lights ain't on
Even got my baby sister ready,
Cause my mama wasn't home.
Got us both to school on time,
To eat us a good breakfast.
Then when I got to class the teacher fussed
Cause I ain't got no pencil.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Homelessness, teen pregnancy, hunger, school violence and chronic or traumatic stress are some of the social determinants of not only health but also educational success. When students wrestle with these social and structural barriers, they are more likely to miss and feel disconnected from school and have worse educational outcomes, including higher rates of dropout. This resource guide was developed to provide practical public health strategies to reduce health inequities and improve educational outcomes among high risk and vulnerable children and adolescents.

Each school has unique needs and will have different priorities. Examining school data can help us understand underlying issues in order to best address student needs. After identifying common issues at your school, this resource guide can assist in planning and adopting strategies to tackle unmet needs and help students succeed.

Implementing these strategies often requires the support of school leadership. Visit the Community Tool Box to find helpful tools and approaches on how to engage administration and enact change in your school.

ABOUT APHA

APHA champions the health of all people and all communities. We strengthen the public health profession. We speak out for public health issues and policies backed by science. We are the only organization that influences federal policy, has a 145-year perspective and brings together members from all fields of public health.

ABOUT CSHE

APHA's Center for School, Health and Education advances school-based health care as a proven strategy for preventing school dropout. We work with health and education partners to develop and implement public health strategies school-wide to improve the well-being and educational success of all students. Learn more at www.schoolbasedhealthcare.org.

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CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

The US Department of Education defines chronic absenteeism as a student missing 15 or more days of school during the year. High levels of chronic absenteeism are linked with low levels of literacy by third grade, higher likelihood of high school dropout and low levels of persistence in college.

PREVENTION & INTERVENTION POLICIES	PRACTICES	SUCCESS STORIES
School/clinic should collect clean, accurate and consistent attendance data.	Standardize attendance tracking, define chronic absence for school, investigate barriers such as: • Caregiving responsibilities. • Safety. • Intermittent electricity or running water.	Grand Rapids changes attendance tracking and sees results.[1]
Students with unmet needs can be connected to on-site resources.	Provide all students with access to prevalent unmet needs such as: • Universal breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks. • Welcoming shower facilities. • Functional space for completing homework. and other academic assignments.	Missouri and California introduce washing machines, attendance improves.[2] Massachusetts school's walking school bus transports children to school safely.[3]
School should encourage and promote student attendance and engagement, foster a pro-attendance culture.	Offer incentive programs for attendance. Thank and brag to parents for cases of improved attendance.	Attendance incentive ideas from elementary, middle and high schools around the country.[4]
Professional staff should be provided with regular, ongoing professional development to improve skills in connecting to students and maintaining healthy relationships.	Prioritize positive relationships for students by: • Implementing mentor programs. • Asking students how they are doing daily.	New York pairs mentors with students to encourage attendance and engagement.[5]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Understanding the Issue:

- Johns Hopkins study on chronic absenteeism
- US Department of Education exploration of chronic absenteeism
- The Education Trust's "Students Can't Wait Workgroup" fact sheet

- Chronic absenteeism and race
- Every Student Succeeds Act passed by Barack Obama to address absenteeism

Additional Success Stories:

- Broad ideas to tackle chronic absenteeism
- Compilation of strategies across the nation to address absence in school
- Baltimore's approach to address chronic absenteeism

- Challenge 5 Campaign in Michigan
- Washington district partners with community groups
- Obama's My Brother's Keeper program
- Las Vegas school's 3 approaches to address chronic absenteeism

FOOD INSECURITY

Food insecurity encompasses nutritional gaps that lead to both hunger and obesity. This issue affects 13 million children and has been linked to such issues as chronic absenteeism.

Photo by MichaelDeLeon, courtesy iStockphoto

PREVENTION & INTERVENTION POLICIES	PRACTICES	SUCCESS STORIES
School can fight poverty stigma by providing universal meals for students.	Provide Breakfast in the Classroom, Summer Meals and After School meals to all students. Establish a school food pantry.	Fairfax County Public Schools serve healthy meals for lunch.[6] Food pantries established in California school.
School can engage parents and community to encourage healthy and cost-conscious eating.	Offer classes to families and community members on how to shop for cheap and healthy food. Offer classes to families and community members on how to cook cheap and healthy meals.	Cooking Matters provides grocery store tours to find healthy food on a budget.[7] School garden in West Philadelphia nourishes students and surrounding community.[8]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Understanding the Issue:

- US Department of Agriculture's definitions of food security description
- Addressing US food insecurity
- Relationship between financial management skills and food insecurity
- No Kid Hungry's facts about food insecurity

- Food insecurity and education
- Food insecurity and children
- No Kid Hungry School Calculator
- No Kid Hungry and school breakfast
- No Kid Hungry and summer meals
- No Kid Hungry and afterschool snacks

Additional Success Stories:

- School breakfast
- Maryland Meals for Achievement
- Breakfast After the Bell
- Backpack Program
- Summer Food Service Program

- Summer meal best practices, page 9
- Public libraries get involved
- Hampton school uses school calculator
- Minnesota school provides three meals a day

HOUSING INSTABILITY

Housing instability affects over 1.3 million students in the United States. Homeless children include those who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. Housing instability disrupts students' academic, emotional and physical well-being.

Photo by DenisTangneyJr, courtesy iStock-photo

PREVENTION & INTERVENTION POLICIES	PRACTICES	SUCCESS STORIES
All staff members should undergo training related to identifying and intervening with homeless youth.	Look for warning signs such as: • Poor hygiene. • Uncharacteristic behavior. • Repeated clothing choices. • Hoarding belongings. Form relationships with new students on their first day, and continue developing relationships with all students throughout the year. Standardize systems for identifying homeless students; screen students at multiple points during year.	National Center for Homeless Education's list of warning signs.[9] Promotor Pathway model connects youth to mentors.[10] Schools in Michigan and Washington adjust their approach to counting homeless students.[11]
Teachers and administrators can provide additional support for students living in unstable housing.	Offer flexible deadlines and additional work time outside of class. Assist and practice patience with transfer students concerning transcripts and test scores. Offer showers, washing machines and school supplies.	Missouri school district provides shelter, food and clothing to students in need.[12] Missouri and California introduce washing machines, attendance improves.[13]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Understanding the Issue:

- US Department of Education's definition of homeless youth
- Homelessness in America's public schools
- Information for homeless liaisons

- Compilation of resource guides related to homelessness
- Teacher's guide to helping homeless students
- Helping the homeless inside school and out

Additional Success Stories:

- National Center for Homeless Education's helpline assists parents and those working with homeless youth
- Student and Family Stability Initiative
- California superintendent describes school's role in addressing homelessness

- RISE model brings school to homeless students
- San Francisco school district partners with homeless organization

Photo by bo1982, courtesy iStockphoto

RECESS

Recess improves classroom attentiveness and allows children to grow physically, emotionally and socially.

PREVENTION & INTERVENTION POLICIES	PRACTICES	SUCCESS STORIES
School should protect daily recess and take steps to guarantee its spot in the schedule.	Reward extra recess time for good behavior rather than taking away recess for bad behavior. Designate indoor and outdoor recess locations for inclement weather, distinguish between recess and physical education class.	North Carolina adjusts recess policy to engage students.[14]
School should take measures to optimize the role of recess in the school day.	Hold recess before lunch instead of after lunch. Train teachers and support staff on recess supervision.	Schools across the country see improvements in behavior and decreases in food waste.[14] Playworks trains teachers how to interact with students on the playground.[15]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Understanding the Issue:

- Physical education in schools
- Crucial role of recess in school
- Adult's role in recess

- Benefits of recess
- Strategies for recess in school

Additional Success Stories:

- Recess before lunch
- Recess backed by science

- Texas schools add recess
- Recess improves behavior and performance

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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice is a philosophy that holds that wrong-doing is best addressed through identifying the harm done by those actions and taking steps to repair that harm.

PREVENTION & INTERVENTION POLICIES	PRACTICES	SUCCESS STORIES
School should take measures to foster a positive school climate to ease student stress and deter violence.	Establish, communicate and discuss school rules and values so students know what is expected of them. Acknowledge positive behavior more than negative behavior. Designate spaces for students to settle down from heated situations.	Chicago schools implement creative approaches to school discipline.[16] San Diego school focuses on positive reinforcement.[17] Baltimore school provides a mindfulness room.[18]
Suspensions and expulsions should be used as a last resort to solve disciplinary issues.	Implement creative problem solving between students, e.g., face-to-face dialogue. Phase out "Zero Tolerance" policies and approach each issue with intent to investigate and solve problems rather than punish.	Denver school decreases suspensions with Project Pave.[19] L.A. school bans suspensions of defiant students.[20]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Understanding the Issue:

- What is restorative justice?
- The case against zero-tolerance policies
- School to prison pipeline and school discipline

- Avoiding zero-tolerance policies
- Reforming school discipline
- Restorative justice in schools

Additional Success Stories:

- More about Denver's restorative justice
- West Virginia parents invited to school for "reverse suspensions"
- Mindfulness in Chicago schools
- Avoiding suspension in pre-school

- Teaching traumatized students
- Adjustment from zero-tolerance
- School embraces restorative justice
- New York school provides safe space
- Rethink restorative justice digital case study New Orleans

Photo by asiseeit, courtesy iStockphoto

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A school's engagement with the community can have a positive effect on student achievement.

PREVENTION & INTERVENTION POLICIES	PRACTICES	SUCCESS STORIES
School should pursue creative ways to connect with the community.	Pursue shared use agreements to open playground and open space to public. Engage with community organizations to address unmet needs.	California school opens park through shared use agreement.[21] Washington school partners with local organizations to address poverty-related challenges.[22]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Understanding the Issue:

- US Department of Education's guide to community engagement
- Why community engagement matters

- Benefits of community engagement
- Value of community engagement
- New Hampshire's resources on community engagement

Additional Success Stories:

- Children's Aid Society's resource on community engagement
- Denver organization solves school problems
- Project L.I.F.T. rallies community support
- New York and Warby Parker
- US Department of Education's strategies for community engagement

- Community engagement as a pathway to parent engagement
- Shared-use agreement engages community
- School board partners with community stakeholders
- How a North Carolina school became a success story

Photo by asiseeit, courtesy iStockphoto

PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Parent engagement is defined as parents and school staff working together to support and improve the learning, development and health of children and adolescents.

PREVENTION & INTERVENTION POLICIES	PRACTICES	SUCCESS STORIES
School should communicate with parents often about child's status and opportunities.	Notify parents of positive behavior more than negative behavior. Inform parents of events and services offered by schools, e.g., school-based health centers and other school-connected services.	California teacher shares her experience with positive phone calls.[23]
School can provide opportunities for parents to engage in healthy activities.	Offer workshops and classes to parents that focus on healthy eating, computer skills, financial literacy, etc.	Chicago school offers "Parent University" for guardians to learn various skills and engage with the school.[24]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Understanding the Issue:

- CDC's guide to parent engagement
- National Education Association spotlight on parenting engagement
- Child Trends resource on parent involvement in schools
- Handbook on family and community engagement

- Parent engagement correlates with student success
- Importance of parent engagement
- Benefits of parent engagement
- Reasons to value parent engagement

Additional Success Stories:

- Best practice stories of parent engagement in Ohio
- Parent involvement leads to successful schools in Cleveland
- Georgia schools go door-to-door before first day of school
- Easy ways for parents to engage their children in school

- Washington school district takes unconventional approach
- Boston school welcomes parents
- Teachers visit home
- Parent engagement is celebrated during American Education Week

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STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Student engagement refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism and passion students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education.

PREVENTION & INTERVENTION POLICIES	PRACTICES	SUCCESS STORIES
Educators can creatively adjust curriculum to engage students within the classroom.	Vary tasks and instruction methods to fit different learning styles. Assign projects that are personalized and problem-based. Coordinate the use of mentors on projects and school work to promote healthy relationships with adults.	New Jersey teacher explores new ways to teach students.[25] New York students are assigned projects that pique their interest.[26] Personalized learning proven to work at two different schools.[27]
School should offer opportunities to engage students outside the classroom.	Offer extracurricular activities and apprenticeships to students. Involve students in decision-making process for school changes when appropriate.	Vermont offers work-based learning for credit.[28] New Hampshire students lead their own parent-teacher conferences.[29]

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Understanding the Issue:

- Different facets of student engagement
- What do students want?
- How to know when students are engaged
- Comprehensive literature review of student engagement
- Classroom management
- Importance of student engagement

Additional Success Stories:

- Ideas to enhance student engagement
- Strategies to better engagement
- There's an app for that: student engagement
- Educational escape rooms
- Student-led meetings
- Morning meetings engage students before class
- Schools pursue standing in the classroom
- Integrating students' lives into the classroom
- Digital case study on student engagement in a Washington, DC middle school

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