

CENTER FOR SCHOOL, HEALTH AND EDUCATION

For science. For action. For health.



Dear Champions of Education and Student Success:

We are at a pivotal moment in both education and health. For the first time in history, youth in the current generation are predicted to be less educated and to have shorter life expectancies than their parents. Reversing both of these disturbing trends demands that we tackle the factors that threaten both educational success and student wellness. School-based health care is uniquely positioned to deliver on that challenge.

In this inaugural edition of our new quarterly Director's Letter, we explore the inextricable link between educational success and student health, and the power of school-based healthcare to curb the dropout crisis. It is our hope that you will be inspired to use this information in your own work and to lend your voice in support of policy change.

Consider that nearly one-third of students in the U.S. do not graduate from high school. For black, Latino and American Indian students, the number increases to one-half. Graduation, in turn, is the leading indicator of both economic success and life-long health. High school dropouts have diminished earning capacity and critical skills, greater dependence on social programs and a vulnerability to falling into the prison pipeline. They are less likely to have health insurance, more likely to rely on tax-supported emergency room care, and more likely to die from cardiovascular disease, cancer, infection, lung disease and diabetes.



Likewise, students' physical, emotional and social health is a leading indicator of educational success. Social issues such as homelessness, teen pregnancy, hunger, bullying, school violence and traumatic stress are leading causes of dropout. Not surprisingly they're also leading causes of poor health. It's really two sides of the same coin.

Studies have shown that school-based health centers play a critical role in preventing dropout by keeping students healthy and in school. They have been shown to reduce absenteeism, improve grade point average, reduce truancy and improve the overall school climate.

Here at the Center for School, Health and Education, our intent is to help at-risk students stay in school and graduate. The key is to broaden the role of school-based health centers to address the social issues that impact the educational success and health of all students school-wide, not just those who come into a clinic.

This summer and fall, we implore policymakers to incorporate student physical and emotional

health and school-based health care in educational and health reform. Specifically we call on:

- Our presidential candidates to include student wellness as they shape their education reform platforms and bring national attention to this dialogue.
- Our congressional leaders to designate \$50 million in funding for operation of school-based health centers as authorized in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act for fiscal year 2013.
- National education reform leaders to address the social factors that influence health and, ultimately, graduation in funding for programs in the Office of Safe and Healthy Students in the U.S. Department of Education and in reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
- Designers of state health insurance exchanges to include school-based health centers as “essential community providers,” meaning they can provide care to students covered under the exchange.
- Architects of state Medicaid redesign to include school-based health centers as eligible providers.
- Designers of state education reform to integrate strategies to boost student health as a means to reducing dropout. For example, currently Race to the Top applications look solely at in-school reforms, such as teacher accountability and testing. But even the best teachers and testing systems can’t succeed if students are battling multiple social and health issues that compromise their ability to learn. By including metrics and strategies for student health, states can dramatically improve academic outcomes and reduce dropout.

Our colleagues at the National Assembly on School-Based Health Care continually monitor and advocate for policy change to support student wellness. Their website, www.nasbhc.org, is an excellent resource for updates on national and state policy developments.

Please watch our website, www.schoolbasedhealthcare.org, for information on the opportunity for school-based health centers to serve as a hub for integrating school-wide strategies and resources to address the achievement and wellness disparities that contribute to dropout.

We stand on the brink of extraordinary changes in education and health care. Thank you for your interest, energy and collaboration with us in ensuring that every young person has the opportunity to reach his or her full potential in education, health and life.

Warmly,
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