

ASSESSING SCHOOL POLICIES, ENVIRONMENT & DEVELOPING A PLAN – CDC SCHOOL HEALTH INDEX²⁴

Promoting healthy and safe behaviors among students is an important part of the fundamental mission of schools, which is to provide young people with the knowledge and skills they need to become healthy and productive adults. Improving student health and safety can:

- Increase students’ capacity to learn
- Reduce absenteeism
- Improve physical fitness and mental alertness

The School Health Index (SHI): Self-Assessment & Planning Guide was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in partnership with school administrators and staff, school health experts, parents, and national nongovernmental health and education agencies for the purpose of:

- Enabling schools to identify strengths and weaknesses of health and safety policies and programs
- Enabling schools to develop an action plan for improving student health, which can be incorporated into the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP)
- Engaging teachers, parents, students, and the community in promoting health-enhancing behaviors and better health

The School Health Index is a self-assessment and planning guide that enables schools to:

- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of their school health promotion policies and programs
- Develop an action plan for improving student health.
- Involve teachers, parents, students, and the community in improving school policies, programs, and services

The policies and practices recommended in the School Health Index are derived from CDC’s research-based guidelines for school health programs, which identify the policies and practices most likely to be effective in improving youth health risk behaviors.

The health and safety habits of students are influenced by the entire school environment. Therefore, the School Health Index has eight different modules, each corresponding to a component of a coordinated school health program. As discussed in the Coordinated School Health section, the eight components are: health education, physical education, health services, nutrition services, counseling and psychological services, healthy school environment, health promotion for staff, and family and community involvement.

It is important to know what the School Health Index is and what it is not.

| The School Health Index is a: | The School Health Index is not a: |
|--|---|
| Self-assessment and planning tool | Research or evaluation tool |
| Community-organizing and educational process | Tool for auditing or punishing school staff |
| Focused, reasonable, and user-friendly experience | Long, bureaucratic, painful process |
| Process that identifies no-cost or low-cost changes | Process that requires expensive changes |
| Process that provides justification for funding requests | Process that identifies unfunded mandates |



Getting Started with the School Health Index

As there is growing recognition of the relationship between health and academic performance, your school's results from using the School Health Index can help you include health promotion activities in your overall School Improvement Plan.

A team consisting of representatives from different groups within the school—parents, teachers, students, administrators, other staff members (health education teachers, physical education teachers, family resource and youth services center staff, nutrition or food service staff, school nurses, counselors, social workers, technology staff, library staff, maintenance and transportation staff to name several), and concerned community members (local health departments, agencies or organizations, faith-based organizations, mental health or social services organizations, businesses and local government to name several)—is responsible for completing eight self-assessment modules. Responses to the items are scored to help you identify your school's strengths and weaknesses.

The School Health Index includes a Planning for Improvement section to help your school develop an action plan for improving student health. Your school's results from the School Health Index can help you include health promotion activities in your Comprehensive School Improvement Plan, which will ultimately allow you to develop an ongoing process for monitoring progress and reviewing your recommendations for change. The School Health Index is your school's self-assessment tool, and it should not be used to compare schools or evaluate the staff. There is no such thing as a passing grade on the School Health Index. You should use your School Health Index scores only to help you understand your school's strengths and weaknesses and to develop an action plan for improving your promotion and management of health and safety.

There is no single way to implement the School Health Index. Schools have developed many approaches, and you need to find the approach that meets your school's needs. The most essential thing to remember is that completing the School Health Index should be a group/team effort. The strength of the process comes from having individuals from different parts of the school community sit down together and plan ways to work toward improving school policies and programs. The connections that develop among School Health Index participants are among the most important outcomes of the process.

Step by Step Guide on the School Health Index Process²⁴

1. Review the eight modules.
2. Assemble the School Health Index team.
3. Identify a coordinator for the School Health Index team.
4. Meet with all members of the School Health Index team.
5. Complete the score cards and planning questions for each module.
6. Complete the overall score card.
7. Meet with all School Health Index team members to review score cards and create a school health improvement plan (which can be a part of your Comprehensive School Improvement Plan - CSIP).

For the details of this “step by step guide on the School Health Index process,” please go to: <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/shi/instructions.htm>.

The School Health Index is available at no cost and available in both online and paper formats. To utilize online or to order a paper copy go to: <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/shi/index.htm>.

