

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Looking to improve student achievement? Consider how healthy your students are. “Healthy children learn better“ is not only common sense, but it is also backed up by data. There is strong evidence of a link between health and academic achievement. Research shows an association between obesity and poor school performance,¹ while a strong, positive connection exists between physical activity and academic performance.² Schools that offer quality breakfast programs not only show an increase in academic achievement, but also an increase in class participation and daily attendance.³ So efforts to increase student achievement should include a focus on health. School health programs and board policies can address these areas by using a coordinated approach to school health – Coordinated School Health. A Coordinated School Health Program (CSHP) consists of eight interactive components that can influence health and learning. This guide explains a Coordinated School Health Program.

In 2010 Kentucky’s national overall health rating was 44th. This rating is comprised of national health benchmarks.⁴ Unhealthy behaviors among Kentucky’s youth also put them at great risk for developing chronic diseases – risking their quality of life in childhood. During the transition from childhood to adulthood, adolescents establish patterns of behavior and make lifestyle choices that affect both their current and future health. Serious health and safety issues such as motor vehicle crashes, violence, substance abuse, and sexual behavior adversely affect adolescents. They also struggle with behaviors that will affect their risk of developing chronic diseases in adulthood, such as eating nutritiously, engaging in physical activity, and choosing not to use tobacco. The data for each of the topic areas covered in the PANTA Plus School Resource Guide includes information from the 2009 Kentucky Youth Risk Behavior Survey as well as other pertinent data sources.

In 2010 with approximately 636,188 children and 100,720 certified and classified staff spending many hours a day in the education process of Kentucky’s 1,233 public schools, the school environment is of immense importance. A healthy school environment can help create a positive learning environment as well as help develop a healthy worksite. When children and adults participate in positive health behaviors multiple health benefits increase. Investment in employee wellness programs has excellent potential for

HEALTH AND SUCCESS IN SCHOOL ARE interrelated. Schools cannot achieve their primary mission of education if students and staff are not healthy and fit physically, mentally, and socially.

— *National Association of State Boards of Education*

major dividends in longer, healthier, more productive lives for employees and the successful functioning of organizations.⁵

Schools and their partner organizations play a key role in helping children and youth learn and engage in healthy behaviors. With local collaboration through a Coordinated School Health/Wellness Committee, schools can find partners within their communities to assist in the assessment of the current school health environment and policies, to set priorities, and to design solutions. Ideally this should include adding health into the comprehensive school improvement planning (CSIP) process. When engaged as decision makers, communities have repeatedly proven that they are up to the task of addressing local problems and supporting schools in their initiatives.⁶

“If schools do not deal with children’s health by design, they deal with it by default.”

— *Health is Academic 1997*

