

HEALTH AND ACADEMICS

Health and Academic Connection

Healthier Students Are Better Learners: A Missing Link in School Reforms to Close the Gap addresses how health disparities impede student motivation and their ability to learn. “By systematically addressing educationally relevant health disparities, schools can reduce both educational and health disparities. Health related problems play a major role in limiting the motivation and ability to learn...”⁷

The academic success of America’s youth is strongly linked with their health. Health-related factors such as hunger, physical and emotional abuse, and chronic illness can lead to poor school performance. Health-risk behaviors such as substance use, violence, and physical inactivity are consistently linked to academic failure and often affect students’ school attendance, grades, test scores, and ability to pay attention in class. In turn, academic success is an excellent indicator for the overall well-being of youth and a primary predictor and determinant of adult health outcomes.

Promoting academic achievement is one of the four fundamental outcomes of modern school health programs. Scientific reviews have documented that school health programs can have positive impacts on educational outcomes, as well as health-risk behaviors and health outcomes. Programs that are primarily designed to improve academic performance are increasingly being recognized as important public health interventions. Student physical activity may help improve academic performance including academic achievement (e.g., grades, standardized test scores); academic behavior (e.g., on-task behavior, attendance); and factors that can positively influence academic achievement (e.g. concentration, attention, improved classroom behavior). Physical activity is positively related to academic performance. Most importantly, adding time during the school day for physical activity does not appear to take away from academic performance. Schools should continue to offer and/or increase opportunities for student physical activity. http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/health_and_academics/index.htm

“No matter how good schools are, students won’t be able to learn if they’re not healthy.”

— *U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, Press Release, January 19, 2011*

School Connectedness

School connectedness is the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals and thus, is an important protective factor. Research has shown that young people who feel connected to their school are less likely to engage in many risk behaviors⁸, including: tobacco use, alcohol and drug use, violence and gang involvement and early sexual initiation. Connected students are also more likely to have better academic achievement, including higher grades and test scores, have better school attendance, and stay in school longer.⁹⁻¹²

Students who feel connected to school believe that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals. When students feel connected to school, they are less likely to engage in a variety of risk behaviors, including tobacco use, alcohol and

“No educational tool is more essential than good health.”

— *Council of Chief State School Officers*



drug use, violence and gang involvement, and early sexual initiation. Connected students are also more likely to have higher grades and test scores, have better school attendance, and stay in school longer. More information on school connectedness can be found on the CDC Healthy Youth website. <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/AdolescentHealth/pdf/connectedness.pdf>

What can schools do?

Healthier Students are Better Learners:

- Make health a fundamental part of elementary and secondary education
- Create effective and efficient school health programs
 - High quality, evidence-based
 - Strategically planned
 - Effectively coordinated

Six Strategies to Increase School Connectedness

- Create decision-making processes that facilitate student, family, and community engagement; academic achievement; and staff empowerment.
- Provide education and opportunities to enable families to be actively involved in their children's academic and school life.
- Provide students with the academic, emotional, and social skills necessary to be actively engaged in school.
- Use effective classroom management and teaching methods to foster a positive learning environment
- Provide professional development and support for teachers and other school staff to enable them to meet the diverse cognitive, emotional, and social needs of children and adolescents.
- Create trusting and caring relationships that promote open communication among administrators, teachers, staff, students, families, and communities.

What can community organizations, agencies and businesses do to help?

National Association of County and City Health Officials

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports Coordinated School Health Programs to facilitate collaboration among local health departments, schools and districts and communities to address health education and health service needs of children in school.

NACCHO encourages the following¹³:

- Development of local infrastructure to help create safe, healthy and nurturing schools that reduce barriers to learning
- Increase communications among local health departments, schools and districts and the community
- Leverage existing and identify new resources for local health departments, schools and districts, and the community to support Coordinated School Health Programs
- Promote collaboration to apply for grants that implement Coordinated School Health Programs among local health departments, schools and districts and the community
- Ongoing research to identify best practices and ensure the efficacy of Coordinated School Health Programs



Council of Chief State School Officers

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. In 2004 CCSSO released a Policy Statement on School Health which states:¹⁴

- Healthy kids make better students and that better students make healthy communities
- Policies and practices that address the health and development needs of young people must be included in any comprehensive strategy for improving academic performance

http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2004/Policy_Statement_School_Health_2004.pdf

“Health and education go hand in hand: one cannot exist without the other. To believe any differently is to hamper progress. Just as our children have a right to receive the best education available, they have a right to be healthy. As parents, legislators, and educators, it is up to us to see that this becomes a reality.”

- *Healthy Children Ready to Learn:
An Essential Collaboration Between Health and Education, 1992*

