

# School Health Centers

Health care



where kids are...

*in school*

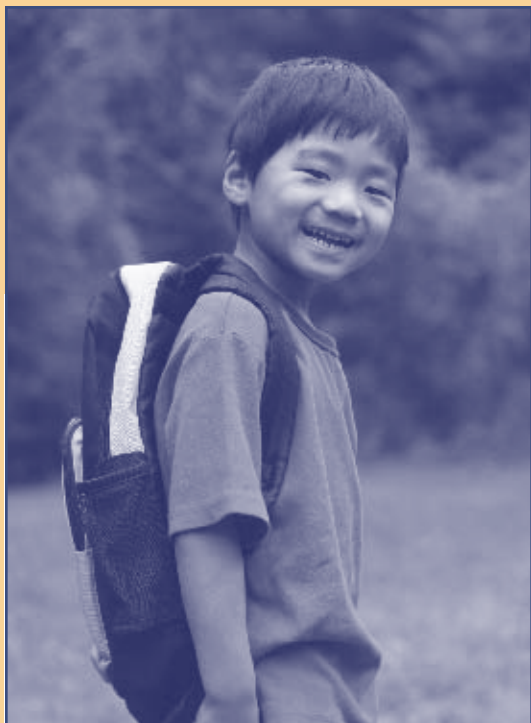


School Health Centers



"When I was trained to be a superintendent, I didn't realize what the job was! I thought the job was curriculum, but now I see that my job is to have children ready to learn... health-wise, psychologically. Any service that helps my children come to school ready to learn is important."

—*Superintendent, San Jose, CA*



Many communities across the state are turning to school health centers to provide health care to all children and to help them succeed in school. Here's why:

### **Schools are a natural place to identify health problems and offer solutions.**

In an essay for her middle school English class, "Lola" described being terrified of having an asthma attack and making her parents take her to the emergency room. When her teacher read this, she recommended that Lola go to the school health center. Lola was reluctant, saying her family couldn't afford it. The teacher informed the health center about the referral, anticipating Lola might feel too scared and shy to go. The school health center followed up with Lola's family and explained that care was available at no cost. The providers began monitoring Lola's asthma on campus and helped the family with the paperwork to get all of their kids enrolled in health insurance.

### **School health centers eliminate transportation barriers and provide health care in a setting that students and families know and trust.**

"Janine" was in 9th grade the first time she came in to the school health center in San Francisco saying she had a headache. The nurse gave her some Advil and a snack. A couple of days later, Janine was back again. The third time, the nurse thought there might be something else going on besides headaches, so she asked more probing questions. Janine was reluctant to talk at first, but revealed that she was in foster care and was experiencing severe turmoil in her household. The nurse recommended counseling and Janine agreed to check it out. Four years later, as a graduating senior heading for college, Janine had not only continued to use the school health center to work through her own mental health issues, but she became very involved as a student leader and peer educator. She says that without the support she found at the school health center, she would never have made it through high school.

### **School health centers allow teachers to teach and students to learn.**

"Alex" was unable to focus or keep in his seat during class. He had been diagnosed with ADHD, but without insurance he was never treated. Unlike his elementary or middle school, his high school in Los Angeles had a health center. One of Alex's teachers referred him, and he was seen free of charge. The medical staff determined his diagnosis was wrong, and he in fact was suffering

from a thyroid disorder. Alex received the treatment he needed. His symptoms became manageable, and he felt normal for the first time in years. The school health center changed his life.

### **Preventing chronic disease requires new approaches to health care that go beyond the exam room.**

When “Carmen” visited the school health center at her high school in Stockton, a routine exam revealed she was at risk for diabetes. The health center staff not only counseled Carmen to improve her nutrition and exercise, they made sure it happened. She got involved in the school health center’s exercise classes and clubs, cooking classes, and nutrition education. She was also screened for mental health issues, which can lead to overeating or poor nutrition. And, equally as important, Carmen’s mother came to cooking classes in the evenings so that she could provide healthier meals at home as well.

### **School health centers create stronger communities.**

In Happy Valley, a rural community in Northern California, more than 50% of the population does not have reliable transportation. For seven-year-old “Hector’s” family, the 12 mile trip to Redding is a major obstacle to getting health care. Fortunately the elementary school in Happy Valley has a health center where Hector receives all of his routine health care. Parents and community members are also served there and sometimes even ride the school bus to get there. The clinic helps make the school a hub of services and activities for the entire community.

School health centers are clinics staffed by professionals such as physicians, nurse practitioners, school nurses, mental health providers, dentists and hygienists. Some are located directly on the school campus; others are located nearby and work closely with the school; still others are located in mobile vans that visit multiple schools. California has a wide diversity of school health centers, each designed to meet the needs of the community where it is located. Some centers provide comprehensive services to the entire community, while others focus only on the students at the school. Some specialize in adolescent services and incorporate education and activities geared specifically for teens. Others are part-time clinics that provide a smaller range of services such as immunizations and physicals. All school health centers emphasize prevention, early detection and increasing access to health care for children.

Teachers often come down for consultation, especially with our mental health providers, “I am having trouble reaching this one student. What can I do in the classroom to be able to relate to the student better?” We are involved in the student assistance program and work with the counselors to be an additional support in the work they are doing.” –*School Health Center Director, Oakland, CA*



“Good schools are part of their communities. When the health center is a community resource that is based at the school, then it can be very successful.” –*Senior Management Staff, Community Health Center, Shasta, CA*



The mission of the California School Health Centers Association is to promote the health and academic success of children and youth by increasing access to high quality health care and support services provided by school health centers.



**School Health Centers**

The **California School Health Centers Association** is a non-profit, advocacy organization leading the way to make school health centers an established part of California's health care system and California's schools. School health centers currently piece together a combination of insurance reimbursement, state, federal and county grants, school district funds, subsidies from community clinics or hospitals, and private donations. Many school health centers are at risk of closing each year. We are working to make school health centers financially sustainable.

**Our work includes:**

- Identifying schools that are interested in starting health centers and helping them with training, guidebooks, funding resources, and connections to others in their communities.
- Helping school health centers develop and fund new programs in areas such as nutrition and fitness, dental services, and mental health.
- Meeting with decision makers such as legislators, school board members, or agency directors to explain the need for school health centers and to promote policies that would provide resources for them.
- Getting the word out about the benefits of school health centers through the media and professional organizations.
- Making sure youth and parents are involved in their school health centers and helping them voice their needs through presentations, meetings with policymakers, and media.
- Working with managed care organizations to make school health centers a part of their system for delivering health care.

**Please join the movement!**

- Explore possibilities for starting a health center at your school. Contact us for help at 510-268-1260.
- Tell your principal, school board, and state, local or federal elected officials that you would like to see health care provided to students in your school.
- Contribute to California School Health Centers Association and the school health center movement by going to: [www.schoolhealthcenters.org](http://www.schoolhealthcenters.org). Donations are tax deductible.

California School Health Centers Association  
[www.schoolhealthcenters.org](http://www.schoolhealthcenters.org)  
510-268-1260

Please call or visit our website for our address and staff contact information.

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