



An Overview of California's School Health Centers

What is a school health center?

School health centers are health clinics located on school campuses. They encompass a variety of models – from large secondary school clinics with full-time medical and mental health staff to smaller part-time clinics offering a limited set of services. “School linked” health centers are located off campus but have formal operating agreements with one or more schools. In some cases, health services are provided on campus by mobile vans.

Where are California's school health centers?

- California has 153 school health centers. 42 are in elementary schools (27%); 14 are in middle schools (10%); 58 are in high schools (38%); 16 are on mixed-grade campuses (10%); and 23 are “school linked” or mobile vans (15%).
- California's school health centers are spread from Del Norte to San Diego County with large concentrations in Los Angeles and the Bay Area.
- The majority of communities served are low-income areas where many children lack health coverage.

What types of services do school health centers provide?

California's school health centers offer a range of services with the most common being basic primary care services such as screenings, immunizations, physicals, and assessments. Many also play an important role in managing students' chronic illnesses such as asthma and diabetes. Some school health centers offer reproductive health services, such as abstinence counseling, pregnancy prevention, and STD/HIV testing and treatment. Many health centers play an important role in mental health and youth development, and a few also provide dental services.

What determines which services are offered?

School health centers are supported by many communities because they respond to local needs. School boards have the final say over what services are provided so the community is always in control.

Who runs school health centers?

School health centers are run by many different types of organizations. The most common are: school districts; Federally Qualified Health Centers, community health centers; hospitals; and county health departments. Other organizations that run school health centers include community-based agencies and private physician groups.

How are school health centers financed?

- Important sources of third-party reimbursement are the Child Health and Disability Program (CHDP), Medi-Cal, Family PACT and Healthy Families.
- Schools contribute financially or through in-kind support of space, utilities, and custodial services.
- School health centers expend considerable effort to obtain grant funding from state, local and private sources. The type of comprehensive care available at many school health centers would not be possible without enhanced funding from these sources.

Services Provided at California School Health Centers (N=105)

Service	% Clinics
Screenings	91%
Immunizations	82%
Sports Physicals	81%
Comprehensive health assessment	82%
Prescriptions for medications	81%
Asthma treatment	80%
Treatment of acute illness	79%
Nutrition counseling	78%
Lab tests	75%
Medication administration	71%
Behavioral risk assessment	70%
Assessment of psychological development	55%
Reproductive health counseling and/or testing	45%
Dental screenings	47%
Mental health therapy	42%
Dental preventative care	14%

National Assembly on School-Based Health Care, 2004-2005 Census

Who benefits from California's school health centers?

School health centers reach the state's most vulnerable children. In school districts with school health centers, 21.5% of the children live in families with incomes at or below the federal poverty in contrast to 15.3% of the children in districts without health centers. School health centers are serving low income students as well as immigrants still learning English. These students are least likely to have health insurance and more likely to experience difficulty in school.

Characteristics of Students in Schools with Health Centers Compared to All Schools in CA

	All CA Schools	Schools with SBHCs		
		Elem.	Middle	High
Average % free/reduced lunch	49%	84%	74%	52%
Average % CalWorks participation	9%	19%	18%	14%
Average % English Language Learners	25%	47%	40%	25%

School health centers support schools struggling to meet academic performance goals. The vast majority of school health centers are located in schools with Academic Performance Index rankings of 5 or less. Over one third of school health centers are in schools with API ranks of 1.

School health centers contribute to the reduction of health disparities. They tend to be located in schools with greater proportions of Latino and African American students. Youth in these ethnic groups are more likely to have higher rates of violent injury, poor nutrition, physical inactivity, use of certain substances, and sexually risky behavior. They are also less likely to have health insurance or to have access to health and mental health services that address these risk factors. Without such services, childhood risk factors are more likely to be translated into higher rates of diabetes, heart disease, cancer and other chronic illnesses in adulthood.

API Ranks of Schools with Health Centers

API Rank	All CA Schools	Schools with Health Centers		
		Elem.	Middle	High
1	10%	38%	40%	37%
2	10%	14%	20%	26%
3	10%	17%	13%	13%
4	10%	17%	0%	5%
5	10%	5%	7%	3%
6	10%	7%	13%	5%
7	10%	0%	0%	5%
8	10%	2%	7%	5%
9	10%	2%	0%	0%
10	10%	0%	0%	0%

Race/Ethnicity of Students in Schools with Health Centers Compared to All Schools in CA

Race/Ethnicity	Elementary		Middle		High	
	Schools with Health Centers	All CA schools	Schools with Health Centers	All CA schools	Schools with Health Centers	All CA schools
White	18%	30%	12%	33%	15%	37%
Latino	66%	49%	68%	46%	49%	40%
African Amer.	6%	8%	11%	9%	15%	8%
Asian	6%	8%	8%	8%	11%	9%