

PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS: How Health Departments Work and How to Work with Health Departments

WHAT HEALTH DEPARTMENTS CAN OFFER SCHOOLS: ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Public health departments can be valuable allies to state and local education agencies seeking to achieve healthy schools. Helping to promote or improve these partnerships is the goal of *Partnering for Success: How Health Departments Work and How to Work with Health Departments*,¹ a publication developed by the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD). *Partnering for Success* outlines 11 key ways in which public health departments can help advance school health goals. This document focuses on one of these: **assessment tools**.

Public health departments can provide schools with assessment and monitoring tools to gather their own data. The health department can provide technical assistance for using these tools, help schools analyze and interpret data after they have been gathered, and translate findings for presentation to general audiences. For example, school staff might like to start tracking the impact of chronic health conditions, such as asthma or diabetes, on student participation in physical education class.

One popular tool is the School Health Index (SHI), a school-level assessment tool. The SHI can be used by teams representing the eight components of a coordinated approach to school health. Teams gather data about the status of each component, analyze those data, and use the findings as the basis for plans to strengthen the components in the context of a coordinated approach to school health. Some states, such as Michigan, have adapted the SHI content and philosophy to make it state specific. Other tools might include examples of logs for tracking visits to the school nurse or incidents of violence, injury, and illness.

A new tool for developing and evaluating goals and programs to improve physical activity and nutrition in school districts is the Wellness Policy Tool developed by the non-profit group Action for Healthy Kids. This tool incorporates existing school health assessments such as the School Health Index into a step-by-step guide to help districts create a school wellness policy.

In Virginia, then-governor Mark Warner initiated a statewide school assessment strategy, the Governor's Nutrition and Physical Activity Scorecard. Under the program, all public elementary, middle, and secondary schools can receive points for implementing research-based "best practices" that promote nutrition and physical activity for K-12 students. Schools across the state can use a web-based scorecard to assess the current status of physical activity and nutrition programs and to measure progress toward their goals.

When it comes to addressing the health of our nation's young people, the public health system is an underutilized resource. Your state or local health department is the place to go for help in building healthy schools.

About NACDD

The National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD) is a national public health association for chronic disease program directors of each state and U.S. territory. Founded in 1988, NACDD links together more than 1,400 members to advocate for preventive policies and programs, encourage knowledge sharing and develop partnerships for health promotion. Since its founding, NACDD has been a national leader in mobilizing efforts to reduce chronic diseases and their associated risk factors through state and community-based prevention strategies. For more information, please visit.

¹ *Partnering for Success: How Health Departments Work and How to Work with Health Departments* (the full publication) and one-page summaries describing how public health departments can help schools in 11 specific areas are available at: <http://www.chronicdisease.org/nacdd-initiatives/school-health/publications/Partnering-for-Success>