

National Collaborative on Education + Health

Overview of the National Collaborative on Education and Health

Educators know that healthy students are better prepared to learn and succeed in school and life after graduation. Public health officials know that a person's educational achievement impacts their overall health and wellbeing. Yet, today's children could become the first generation to live shorter and less healthy lives than their parents and many of the nation's children struggle to thrive academically. In order to address this trend, the health and education sectors must work together and with others to support schools in creating the optimal conditions for student health, wellness, and learning.

Mission of the National Collaborative on Education and Health

To identify opportunities for the health and education sectors, individually and together with others, to contribute to ensuring that all children, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, or geography, have the opportunity to be healthy and academically and developmentally successful, allowing them to reach their full potential as productive members of the United States.

Structure and Activities

The National Collaborative on Education and Health (the Collaborative) is guided by a national steering committee which is responsible for providing overall strategic guidance to the Collaborative, supporting the implementation of best practices and recommendations developed by the Collaborative, helping to disseminate information and attracting resources to the work of the Collaborative. A current list of national steering committee members is included below.

The work of the Collaborative primarily takes place through working groups that bring together practitioners, experts and policymakers around a specific topic/charge set by the national steering committee. The working groups develop recommendations and identify best practices addressing their charge, and identify strategies for promoting the adoption of these recommendations and scaling up best practices. In addition, members of the national steering committee and working groups play a key role in supporting the dissemination of recommendations and findings to relevant stakeholders and encouraging key institutions to make the recommended changes.

Focus Areas

The work of the Collaborative focuses on changes that support schools, with a focus on the K-12 environment, in creating the conditions for student health and academic success. Focus areas that are timely and have the potential to make a significant impact in meeting the mission of the Collaborative are identified by the national steering committee and addressed through working groups. These include:

Supporting Healthy Schools and Student Health and Wellness through the Every Student Succeeds Act

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed into law the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. ESSA recognizes the need for schools to support the whole child and specifically acknowledges the importance of promoting physical and mental health and wellbeing. The implementation of ESSA at the federal level, and subsequent compliance with the new law by state education agencies and local educational agencies, provides an important opportunity to more fully integrate student health into education policy and practice. For example, under the new law states and school districts are required to include rates of chronic absenteeism in their report cards and Title I funding can be used to support efforts to support healthy schools and student health and wellness.

Mental Health

Mental health disorders, including anxiety, depression and personality disorders, have a significant impact on students' ability to learn. Given that one in five children have a diagnosable mental health problem, there is a critical need to identify and implement evidence-based strategies in schools that support the social and emotional wellness of students. A growing body of research has demonstrated that there are effective strategies that can promote the conditions of learning and mental health, yet these strategies are not widely adopted in schools. As a result, there is an important need to support more widespread adoption of a primary prevention framework to support mental health and the conditions of learning in schools.

Increasing Access to School Health Services

While schools have always been an important center for providing safety net and emergency care for students (e.g., school nurses, school-based health clinics) and having healthy students has been important to learning, the growing complexity of the health challenges faced by our students (from obesity/physical inactivity and food insecurity to managing multiple chronic conditions) requires a reexamination of the health-related services available within schools and how they are financed. In addition, the recent reversal of the free care policy and transition of Medicaid to managed care present important opportunities for increasing access to and resources for school health services.

Addressing the Causes of Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism—missing 10 percent or more of school days for any reason—is an early warning sign of academic risk and school dropout. While the causes of chronic absenteeism are multi-fold, research shows that student health and wellness issues are a leading contributor. As a result, identifying and implementing health interventions is a critical step to addressing chronic absenteeism and a key opportunity for collaboration among the health, public health, and education sectors.

Preventing Substance Misuse in Schools

Substance misuse remains a serious problem in the nation's schools and directly contributes to poor performance by students. Given that schools can serve as a point of intervention for both primary prevention and early screening and treatment of substance use, there is a need to identify evidence-based best practices and emerging models of intervention to prevent substance use and misuse among students.

Incorporating Health and Wellness Metrics into Education Data Systems

Given the education sector's increased emphasis on data-based decision making and transparency, and given the importance of health to student's ability to learn, there is an important opportunity for integrating health and wellness metrics into education data systems. Incorporating metrics for health and wellness into these systems can provide educators, policy makers and the public with a more complete understanding of how student health and wellness are impacting learning and are key to improving the academic outcomes and health of students.

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National Steering Committee of the National Collaborative on Education and Health

CO-CHAIRS OF THE NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE

Rochelle Davis

President and CEO
Healthy Schools Campaign

Rich Hamburg

Interim President and CEO
Trust for America's Health

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE

Sharon Adams-Taylor

Associate Executive Director
AASA: The School Superintendent's Association

Elaine Gantz Berman

State Board of Education Member
Colorado State Board of Education

Peggy Agron

National Director, Healthy Schools
Kaiser Permanente

Breana Holmes

Chairperson – Council on School Health
American Academy of Pediatrics

Trina Anglin

Senior Federal Staff for the National Coordinating
Committee on School Health and Safety

Frederick Isasi

Director - Health Division
National Governors Association

Marty Blank

President
Institute for Educational Leadership

Jeff Kirsch

Vice President
Council for a Strong America

Bechara Choucair

Senior Vice President – Safety Net & Community Health
Trinity Health

Alicia Lara

Senior Vice President of Impact
United Way Worldwide

Gail Christopher

Vice President of Program Strategy
W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Represented by Ellen Braff-Guajardo, Program Officer

Jeff Levi

Professor of Health Policy and Management
Milken Institute of Public Health
George Washington University

Linda Darling-Hammond

President and CEO
The Learning Policy Institute

Kent McGuire

President and CEO
Southern Education Foundation

Christopher Edley

Co-Founder and Co-President
The Opportunity Institute

Jennifer Ng'andu

Program Officer
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Samantha Poppe

Associate Director of Policy
National Council of La Raza

Mary Cathryn Ricker

Executive Vice President
American Federation of Teachers

Karen Seaver Hill

Director of Children's Advocacy
Children's Hospital Association

George Sheridan

Executive Committee Member
National Education Association

Brian Weaver

Vice President - Healthy Schools Program
Alliance for a Healthier Generation

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE

Shavon Arline-Bradley

Director of Community Engagement
Office of the Surgeon General

Monique Chislm

Deputy Assistant Secretary
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
U.S. Department of Education

Khesha Reed

Associate Director
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Children's Health

Jane Sanville

Deputy Director for Demand Reduction
White House Office of National Drug Control Policy

Karen Scott

Chief Medical Officer
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Health
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Joaquin Tamayo

Special Assistant
U.S. Department of Education

Katie Wilson

Deputy Under Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture