

## HEALTHY SCHOOLS

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### Background

An estimated one-third of American youth are considered at risk of becoming overweight and obese, while 17% of children ages 6 to 17 had obesity in 2023. Children's mental health is also suffering, with suicide being the second leading cause of death for children aged 10 to 14 years. Schools are optimal environments for promoting children's health, with 95% of U.S. children attending schools for roughly 6 hours each day. Schools play a critical role in modeling and reinforcing healthy dietary, physical activity, and social-emotional behaviors.

### CDC Programs Addressing Healthy Schools

CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH) administers a School Health program that brings together the education and public health sectors to support chronic disease prevention and funds key leaders from the health and education fields to:

- Provide training and professional development for school administrators and staff to help ensure students are healthy and ready to learn.
- Offer information and resources to help parents get involved in their child's school. These resources also enable parents to advocate for their child and help shape a healthy school environment.
- Collect data to aid decision-making and evidence-based strategies.

Current funding allows CDC to fund 16 states to support student health, strengthen the evidence base, and create tools and resources to help schools and families. Increased funding would enable more states to establish or increase strategic school health efforts focusing on the whole child, ensuring students are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. Additional funds would also help states address the youth mental health crisis by enhancing students' mental health and well-being in the school environment and beyond.

### Promoting Healthy Schools

Establishing healthy behaviors during childhood is easier and more effective than trying to change unhealthy behaviors during adulthood. School can promote young people's health and help them establish lifelong healthy patterns including nutrition, physical activity, and social-emotional behaviors that can prevent chronic diseases and promote resiliency. Each school day is an opportunity for the nation's 55 million students to be in a healthy learning environment and practice lifelong healthy habits. The academic success of America's youth is strongly linked with their health. Scientific reviews have documented that school health programs can positively affect educational outcomes. Health-related factors such as depression, hunger, chronic illness, and physical inactivity can lead to poor school performance and academic outcomes. In addition, children with chronic health conditions may face lower academic achievement, increased disability, fewer job opportunities, and limited community interactions as they enter adulthood.

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