

# What School Boards Can Do To Enhance Student Learning by Supporting a Coordinated Approach to Health

National School Boards Association

Schools play a critical role in addressing the physical, mental, social, and environmental factors related to health and well-being that can affect learning. Adopting effective policies and practices to attend to these factors helps position students for success in school and throughout their lifetimes. Aligned closely with a coordinated school health approach, NSBA's Key Work of School Boards framework recognizes the unique position school boards have to create conditions in schools that improve learning. The following are concrete actions that school boards can take to support a coordinated approach to enhance learning and health:

## What framework and structures are needed?

### Why is School Health Important?

*When school districts and schools have effective policies and practices that support the health and well-being of their students and staff:*

- Student and staff absenteeism decreases
- Student concentration improves
- Student behavior problems are reduced
- Children and adolescents establish health-promoting behaviors

Directors of Health Promotion and Education, 2007; Murray, Low, Hollis, Ross, & Davis, 2007; WestEd and the Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies, 2009

- **Vision:** The district's **vision/mission includes a statement concerning the health and well-being of students and school personnel** as a foundation for school improvement and academic success.
- **Staff direction:** The school board considers **attitudes and behaviors that promote physical, mental, social, and environmental health when hiring and evaluating the superintendent.**
- **Alignment:** The school board and superintendent work together with school personnel, families, and community partners to establish, communicate and support **health promotion policies and plans that align with the district's vision/mission** and monitor progress toward achievement of health-related goals and objectives.
- **Coordination:** The school board supports, through policy and allocation of resources, the appointment of **at least one staff member with dedicated time and authority as designated coordinator(s)** to oversee and manage a coordinated and multi-disciplinary approach for the district to support the health and well-being of students and school personnel.
- **Collaboration:** The district has established a **school health advisory council** that meets regularly and works with the school board, superintendent, and designated coordinator(s) to determine district health priorities; support the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies and practices; and foster community partnerships that promote health as a foundation for school success.



## How do health & wellness data drive decisions?

- Continuous improvement: The school board includes **health-related goals and objectives, with measurable outcomes** (e.g., changes in students' attendance and behaviors) **in the development of the district's strategic plan and school improvement plan(s)**. The school board recognizes that effective programming requires a minimum three- to five-year commitment in order to identify and document positive outcomes and supports making adjustments as necessary to policies and practices if outcomes do not improve.
- Policy adoption: The school board adopts **policy based on the documented health needs of students and school personnel**, using local health and education data and current knowledge regarding school environment, standards-based health and physical education curricula, and evidence-based approaches.
- Accountability: The school board establishes a **system for assessment and reporting progress**, at least annually, on achieving health-related goals and objectives, monitoring adherence to all school health policies, revising policies when needed, and collecting data that demonstrate links between academic achievement and health and well-being.
- Staff accountability: The school board includes progress toward achievement of **health-related goals and objectives in performance evaluation criteria** of the superintendent and encourages their use for other school personnel, as appropriate.

### *Did you know?*

- Nearly 70% of high school students had less than 8 hours of sleep on an average school night

- 22.7%\* have been offered, sold or given an illegal drug on school property

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010

- Asthma is one of the leading causes of school absenteeism; an estimated 12.8 million school days are missed each year because of asthma

Akinbami, 2006

*What are the implications of these and similar facts for today's school leaders?*

## Which resources indicate support?

- Dedicated budget: The school board's approved **budget includes dedicated line item support** for at least a portion of the cost of the designated coordinator(s), rather than relying solely on grant or other temporary funding sources.
- Coordination support: The school board allocates **sufficient fiscal and human resources to support the designated coordinator(s)** in achieving measurable academic and health outcomes, with attention to:
  - collaborative planning time
  - physical space
  - materials and supplies
  - professional development
  - technological support
  - data collection and analysis
  - communication systems
- Creative partnerships: The school board encourages **innovation and collaboration internally and with families and community partners** that include a willingness to blend funding and share district resources to achieve mutual goals.

## What messages are conveyed?

*“As a board, we believe that promoting student and staff health through a coordinated school health approach boosts academic performance and improves quality of life.”*

Margie Bradford,  
School board member  
Bardstown City Schools, KY

- Health–learning connection: The school board understands, models, and can articulate the **inextricable link between academic achievement and the health and well-being of students and school personnel**. The school board actively promotes a coordinated approach to enhancing academic and health outcomes among school personnel, students, families, and the wider community.
- Policy support: The school board becomes familiar with federal and/or state legislative requirements pertaining to health and well-being of students (e.g., local wellness policy), and supports **policy and practice adherence to fully meet these legislative requirements**.

## How is the health of school personnel promoted?

- The school board encourages the superintendent to identify opportunities the school board may **support for school personnel to practice and model healthy behaviors**. Commitment to a healthy worksite might include:
  - Access to school fitness facilities and/or equipment
  - Time for physical activity, health education, or other health-related services during staff development days
  - Recognition for participation in individual health risk assessment and health promotion activities
  - Consideration of including a personal health objective as part of professional development plans

### Definition of Terms

**School board** is intended to include the governing authority of the school district that has responsibility for policy adoption and budget approval.

**Coordinated approach** addresses health issues applying systemic processes in collaboration with school, family and community partners. Components that support healthy development and academic achievement - health education; physical education; health services; nutrition services; counseling, psychological, & social services; healthy school environment; health promotion for staff; and family/community involvement – provide a foundation for a coordinated approach. For more information on Coordinated School Health, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/CSHP/>.

**District** is intended to mean the local education agency (LEA), which might vary in size and governance by the state. It represents a geographic entity of public schools in which primary and/or secondary schools are administered as a unit. In most localities, a district has a school board as the governing body and a superintendent as the chief administrator.

**Coordinator** refers to an individual’s role, not necessarily their title, that includes dedicated time and authority to oversee and manage a district-wide, multi-disciplinary approach to support the health and well-being of students and school personnel.

**School health advisory council** is intended to include any coordinating body (by any name) at the school district level, that includes school staff from all levels, school board members, students, parents, community agencies and organizations, and private businesses with a vested interest in supporting the health, safety, and well-being of school-age children and youth. Council members are engaged to contribute expertise, personal passion, time, and other kinds of support to the decision-making process and related activities. There could be several working committees (by any name) dedicated to specific focus areas that report regularly and guide the council’s work. Ideally, a collaborative relationship allows this group to inform and respond to the decisions of the school board.

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