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# How Can School Nurses and School-Based Health Centers Work Together to Build a Healthy Partnership?

By Victoria Jackson, RN, MS, NCSN, Illinois

As a school nurse, you know that students must be healthy to fully participate in their educational experience. You are very aware of the struggle you face locating a medical provider for students without insurance. Students with insurance may have difficulty finding a provider who will accept their insurance. Once an appointment is made, it may be difficult for the student to get there because of a lack of transportation or the parent's inability to leave work to take the child to the appointment.

School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) have proven to be the answer to many of these issues. SBHCs do not duplicate or replace school nursing services. Rather, SBHCs provide school nurses with a valuable and readily accessible resource to get students the healthcare they need. Located on school grounds or nearby the school, a comprehensive SBHC may provide a wide variety of services, including general health assessments, school/sports physicals, Early and Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Testing (EPSDT), laboratory and diagnostic screenings, immunizations, first aid, family planning counseling and services, prenatal and postpartum care, dental services, drug and alcohol abuse counseling, mental health, and other services based on the students' needs and the philosophy of the managing agency and school administration. The SBHC model emphasizes assessment of health risks and providing appropriate treatment or referral for identified issues.

The school nurse plays a valuable role in identifying the need for an SBHC. School nurses, as trusted health experts, have established a strong relationship with school administrators and can be very influential in securing administrative support for a health center. The nurse's knowledge of the community and relationship with various agencies and organizations addressing the health needs of children and youth will foster bringing needed partners to the table. The success of the center is directly related to the strength of the school health advisory partnership, in which the school nurse is a vital member.

The school nurse:

- knows the medical needs of the student population;
- understands the structure of the school day and procedural issues that must be addressed for students to access the center;
- markets the center to students, parents, and school staff;
- assists the student in implementing the plan of care within the school environment; and

- provides staff and student health education in partnership with the health center.

The National Assembly on School-Based Health Care (NASBHC) states, "School nurses and school-based health center staff share an important mission: protecting and advancing the health and well-being of our nation's school-aged children." The success of the partnership between the school nurse and SBHC requires:

- well-defined roles and responsibilities;
- respect and support for each partner's contributions;
- joint policies and procedures that ensure confidentiality and quality care; and
- information sharing in compliance with state and federal law.

Lack of cooperation between the school nurse and SBHC can result in fragmented care, duplication of services, gaps in delivery of services, and poor use of existing resources and services. By working together, school nurses and health center personnel can foster timely access to care, decreased absenteeism, coordinated implementation of treatment plans, and healthy children and adolescents. If there is an SBHC in your area, you are encouraged to visit the center to learn more about the specific services provided and become involved. For more information on SBHCs, please visit the NASBHC Web site at [www.nasbhc.org](http://www.nasbhc.org) and also see NASN's 2001 Position Statement, *The Role of the School Nurse in School-Based Health Centers*, at <http://www.nasn.org/Default.aspx?tabid=245>. A copy of the Illinois Standards for School-Based Health Center can be found at <http://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/admincode/077/07702200sections.html>.

*To discuss the partnership between school nurses and SBHC staff in your state, please contact your State School Nurse Consultant. To locate contact information for your State School Nurse Consultant, please visit the National Association of State School Nurse Consultants' Web site at [www.nassnc.org](http://www.nassnc.org) and click on "About Us" to gain access to a listing of our members.*

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