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How Can Schools Obtain Funding for School Health Services?

By Pat Clemen, RN, BSN, MTS, Mississippi

This section is written by members of the National Association of State School Nurse Consultants.

The question today seems to be centered on funding. Every state agency claims to need more funding. Funding resources for school health services must be identified at both the state and local levels. Although school budgets are facing difficult times, opportunities exist in all communities to join with nontraditional partners to promote school health nurse programs.

Mississippi has creatively tapped into a resource that holds great potential. Currently, less than 30% of Medicaid-eligible school-age children receive their annual Early Periodic Screening and Diagnostic Testing (EPSDT). In Mississippi, as in many other states, this unmet opportunity offers a common starting point for planning around improved health services for children and youth.

In an effort to increase the proportion of Medicaid-eligible children who are screened each year, the Division of Medicaid initiated a discussion with the Mississippi State Department of Education, Office of the Governor, the Mississippi State Department of Health, and a private foundation. The school nurses seemed to be the logical answer because the majority of Medicaid-eligible children are in the public school system. The answer was to find a way to fund school nurses via EPSDT screening.

The private foundation, as part of its mission, provides start-up funding that will lead to sustainable programs. With this focus, a collaborative effort between the private foundation, the Department of Health, the Department of Education, and the Division of Medicaid led to a grant program that will provide seed money to set up school-based clinics and fund the clinic nurses. In addition, the foundation provided customized software to make the EPSDT billing process seamless for the nurses.

The foundation awarded the 2-year grant to the Mississippi Department of Health to establish a School Health Nurse EPSDT Grant Program. Twelve schools were awarded a grant to work with their local medical community to establish an EPSDT clinic site in the school setting.

The twelve schools are up and running. The expectation is that within 2 years, through Medicaid administrative

claiming and EPSDT screenings, the school-based clinics will be self-sustaining. The grant ends May 31, 2004. However, if it is determined that with the start-up funding, school health centers can be established that are financially self-sustaining, it is possible that the foundation would consider funding the establishment of additional school health centers.

The school health nurse program for EPSDT is one example of how states can forge nontraditional partnerships that can strengthen funding for school health services.



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