



Rx for success — optimal health for optimal learning

School-based health centers boost achievement

Gary Motz, managing editor

There are many nonacademic barriers to student learning. But there is probably no greater barrier than poor health, both physical and mental.

Sick and hungry children can't learn. A child with a mouth full of cavities can't learn. Depressed and anxious children can't learn.

A common denominator among most of these students is a lack of access to regular health care. Children living in poverty or unstable homes are particularly vulnerable. For many, a hospital emergency room serves as the family doctor.

Alliance offers resources for starting school-based health centers

Is your district interested in exploring the benefits of school-based health centers? The Ohio School-Based Health Alliance (OSBHA) has resources to help you learn more.

For further information, contact OSBHA President Dr. **Marilyn Crumpton** at marilyn.crumpton@cincinnati-oh.gov or OSBHA Immediate Past President and Voices for Ohio's Children CEO **Sandy Oxley** at sandy@raiseyourvoiceforkids.org.

Crumpton will be presenting a workshop on school-based health care at Voices for Ohio's Children's upcoming state conference. The 2015 Ohio Kids Health Conference: Healthy Inside and Out is set for May 6 and 7 in Columbus. For details and registration information, visit www.raiseyourvoiceforkids.org/event/6.

The National School-Based Health Alliance also has information posted at <http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/43817>.

What's more, these students will move into adulthood unable to manage their own health. Without adequate care, they will become more prone to chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, obesity and more. This, in turn, will lead to shortened lifespans, permanent disabilities, a reduced quality of life and billions of dollars in avoidable health care costs.

However, for children who gain earlier access to health care and health education, these trends can be reversed. That goal is what's fueling the rise in school-based health centers in Ohio and across the nation, helping connect under-served children to the health care they so badly need.

"We know that kids cannot reach their full educational potential if they are hungry and sick or absent all the time," said **Sandy Oxley**, immediate past president of the Ohio School-Based Health Alliance and CEO of Voices for Ohio's Children. "School-based health centers look at students in a holistic way, recognizing that if they have unmet health needs, they're not going to be able to perform at the top of their academic scale."

The Ohio School-Based Health Alliance, founded in 2001, works to promote the growth of locally tailored and sustainable school-based health centers through educational programs, advocacy, technical assistance and sharing best practices. It is an affiliate of the National School-Based Health Alliance and has about 50 centers as active members.

Ohio's school health centers range from **Cincinnati City's** full-service Oyler School clinic to mobile units in **Columbus City** and **Cleveland Municipal** districts. Some schools do not have centers, but access services at other school buildings in what is known as linked health care.



By focusing on prevention as well as treatment, Ohio's school-based health care centers not only promote better student health, they also reduce absenteeism, improve academic achievement and boost graduation rates.

"Behavioral and mental health is a big piece in a lot of the school settings," said Oxley, who also serves on the School-Based Health Care Advisory Workgroup created last year by the Ohio General Assembly to research ways to improve academic achievement through better student health. "Behavioral problems may be related to an untreated health need; a number of the districts focus on that. But the services run the gamut, because programs are developed at the community level based on need."

A major challenge for the Ohio centers has been sustainability. But that has eased somewhat since the state expanded Medicaid coverage in 2013 under the Affordable Care Act. The expansion also helped overcome a major barrier that had prevented many children from getting health care — a lack of insurance. And, it provided a big boost for students and school health centers alike.

"Since the governor helped expand Medicaid, we are able to use that as a resource for children," said pediatrician Dr. **Marilyn Crumpton**, Ohio School-Based Health Alliance president and medical director for the Cincinnati Health Department's Division of School and Adolescent Health. "It really represented an opportunity for Ohio's school-based health centers. Now that they have insurance, we have a responsibility to make sure it translates into health access and better outcomes."

School-based health care services encompass what a child would receive at a conventional doctor's office, said Crumpton, whose role at the health department includes overseeing 11 of Cincinnati City Schools' 21 school-based centers. The district, a leader in school-based health care, is home to about half of all the centers in Ohio. The staff at Cincinnati's health centers includes, at a minimum, a nurse practitioner or physician.

"Prevention is a big part of what the centers do, such as comprehensive physicals and preventive health care like health education, immunizations and routine screenings," Crumpton said. "In addition, the centers provide acute illness care, including prescriptions. Identifying and managing chronic diseases, like asthma, is another piece that helps drive the greatest improvements, because those are some of the highest costs of health care."

"The annual direct health care cost of asthma is approximately \$50.1 billion. Asthma also is the No. 1 cause of illness-related school absence in the U.S., which has a huge impact on academics."

Dental and vision care also play a big role in Cincinnati. The district has two centers with comprehensive dental facilities and full-time dentists, with a third to open soon. Crumpton said dental screenings reveal a 22% rate of tooth



decay among students, about the same as the national rate. But, she said, the rate of advanced decay is high.

"We had our first high school student who had to get dentures in 2014," Crumpton said. "That's really a strong statement of, not only is the decay among students significant, but it's also more advanced. And we're still seeing high school students who have never been to the dentist."

The Cincinnati district also focuses strongly on vision care, with Oyler School the center of that effort. One component of that began several years ago through a partnership with the OneSight foundation.

"For one week during the school year, OneSight provided free vision services at a temporary site and we would have anywhere from 700 to 1,000 kids get glasses that week," Crumpton said. "The problem was, if you missed that week, you were out of luck."

"Since so many of the kids are from low-income families and have Medicaid, we started talking about creating a billable model that might be self-sustaining and ongoing throughout the school year."

Now, thanks to Medicaid payments and a partnership among OneSight, the school district, Oyler School, the

Cincinnati Health Department, Cincinnati Eye Institute, Ohio Optometric Association and local fundraisers, Oyler has its own vision center, complete with an on-site optometrist and an optician who visits schools to fit children with glasses. The program served 60 schools and provided 3,000 eye exams last year.

In addition to lowering absenteeism by improving student health, the centers offer another advantage: Students who don't have leave school for medical appointments spend more time in class.

"It's certainly true that healthy kids are going to learn better," Oxley said. "But the fact that students don't have to leave school to go to the doctor really reduces the out-of-school time. And the centers schedule the appointments so there is the least academic interruption by making them during non-core classes and not taking students out of important classes like math or reading."

There also are benefits for parents: less time away from work, not to mention convenience.

"A great example is kids with asthma, which can require multiple visits," Crumpton said. "By providing treatment at the center, you are keeping parents at work, which is really critical because a lot of these families are in jobs where the benefits are very limited, and lost time can mean lost pay."

Crumpton said school-based health centers in Ohio work with a medical partner — such as a health department, a community health center or hospital — as their sponsoring agent, which connects them with a larger system. Most of the centers bill for services, and because they tend to be located in schools where the poverty rates are the highest, Medicaid is the majority payer.

In Cincinnati schools, public-private partnerships have propelled the growth of school-based health centers, Crumpton said. A major funding partner was the Health Foundation (now called Interact for Health), which started working on planning and implementing school-based health centers in 1999. That effort was driven by the district's move to transform schools into Community Learning Centers that would serve the needs of students, schools and community members by working with local partners.

Interest in putting student health services in the Community Learning Centers grew, and near the end of 2010, the Health Foundation and Growing Well had helped set up 10 health centers in Cincinnati schools.

Growing Well, of which Crumpton is a founding director, is a coalition of local providers and community organizations that coordinate health services in the district.



Many Ohio districts' school-based health care centers provide dental care. Cincinnati City has two centers with comprehensive dental facilities and full-time dentists, with a third to open soon.

The partnership's work became more urgent when the city of Cincinnati announced in December 2010 it was eliminating its school nurse program. Since then, the district has added 11 health centers.


"Growing Well's slogan is, 'Optimal health for optimal learning,'" Crumpton said. "It's a collaborative that includes Interact for Health, Cincinnati Children's Hospital, the city of Cincinnati and the school district. The school board has always been at the table as well. It's really a community that came together to identify and address health inequities for kids.

"We all realized, based on the research, that school-based health centers really represented a way to improve academics for students by improving their health. Children in poverty are so impacted negatively by poor health outcomes because

they don't have access to appropriate health care."

According to the Ohio School-Based Health Alliance, national studies show absenteeism has dropped by half in schools with health centers, tardiness has decreased by 25%, GPAs have risen and chronic health conditions are better managed.

"If we're going to improve health outcomes in this country, we really have to understand the social determinants and what they are costing all of us," Crumpton said. "If you look at the opportunities in school-based health and being able to provide services in the school setting, there are a couple of things going on. One, that's where the kids are. But more importantly, there's the opportunity — because you're becoming part of the community — to understand some of the barriers to health care and work to overcome them." ■



Celebrate the stars in your district at the OSBA Student Achievement Fair

Tuesday, Nov. 10, 2015 • 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. • Greater Columbus Convention Center

The OSBA Capital Conference Student Achievement Fair highlights outstanding student performance groups and fresh, innovative initiatives from school districts across the state. The fair will be held from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 10, 2015, during the OSBA Capital Conference and Trade Show.

Student Achievement Fair performing groups

OSBA will choose one school district performing group from each of the association's five regions to perform during the Student Achievement Fair. Each group will perform for 20 minutes. To nominate a performing group, submit a nomination at <http://conference.ohioschoolboards.org/2015/saf-nominations> and email an electronic video audition or YouTube link to Cheryl W. Ryan, deputy director of school board services, at cryan@ohioschoolboards.org. Only electronic recordings will be accepted.



Student Achievement Fair district programs

OSBA is accepting nominations for district programs that improve student achievement. For more ideas, visit <http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/60021> to view the list of 2014 Student Achievement Fair district programs.

One hundred programs highlighting student achievement will be selected. The online application is available at the link below.

The nomination deadline is Friday, June 26. Visit <http://conference.ohioschoolboards.org/2015/saf-nominations> to nominate a student performing group or district program today!