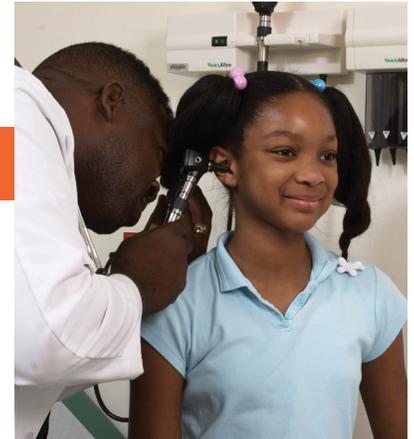


DISCUSSION GUIDE: Investing in coordinated school health for all students

MAY 2015



PURPOSE

This *Discussion Guide* focuses on the recommendation to “invest in coordinated school health programs for all students.” It is designed to provide you with a better understanding of the issues involved and the barriers standing in the way of this goal. We encourage you to use the [Action Toolkit](#) that accompanies this *Discussion Guide* to identify ways to bring this conversation to your community and take steps to make a difference. A digital version of both the *Discussion Guide* and the *Action Toolkit*, with additional resources, is available at <http://forthesakeofall.org/take-action/>.

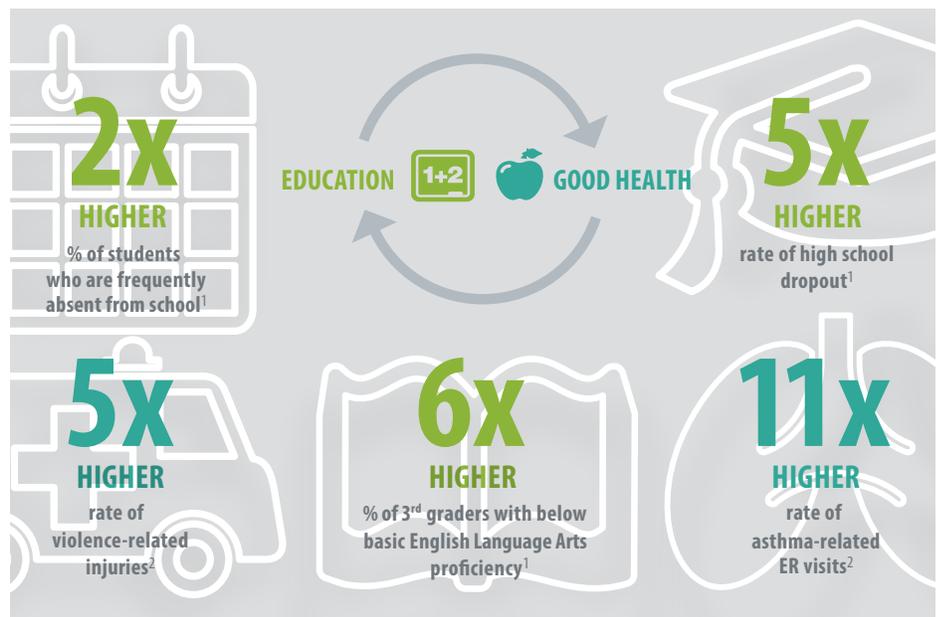
BACKGROUND

Health and education go hand in hand, and investments in both can set children up for success throughout life. Compared to those with a college education, those with less education are more likely to be sicker, experience more psychological distress, have less healthy lifestyles, generate higher medical costs, and die earlier.¹

More education leads to better health, but good health can also put children on a successful path to completing education. Factors related to health, including hunger, chronic illness, substance abuse, and violence, can affect a student’s ability to learn and do well in school.²⁻⁵ Ultimately, the ability to learn will impact whether a young person completes high school. Despite this, health is often missing in the conversation about school dropout, and vice versa.⁶ There are also many economic benefits to consider. For instance, if 1,000 dropouts in the St. Louis region had earned their diplomas: \$21 million more would likely be spent on homes; \$1.1 million of tax revenues would be generated; and gross regional product would increase by \$15 million.⁷

Although health impacts everyone’s ability to learn, there are many examples of racial

Compared with whites, African American children and youth in St. Louis have poorer educational and health outcomes



¹ Source: Missouri Department of Secondary and Elementary Education (DESE), 2014. Notes: Each indicator is a sum of the City of St. Louis public school district and all the public school districts in St. Louis County, Missouri. These indicators only include data that were reported to DESE by school districts. High school dropout (%): 8.1% (African Americans), 1.6% (whites); below basic in 3rd grade English Language Arts: 23.9% (African Americans), 3.8% (whites); students attending less than 90% of the time (grades K-12): 16.2% (African Americans), 7.4% (whites).

² Source: MODHSS, Injury MICA (2012); MODHSS, Emergency Room MICA (2012). Notes: Asthma ER rate (age 15-19): 22 per 1,000 (African Americans), 2 per 1,000 (whites); rate of injuries due to fighting (age 15-19): 1,204 per 100,000 (African Americans), 240 per 100,000 (whites). Each indicator is a sum of St. Louis County and the City of St. Louis.

differences in health. In Missouri, African American high school students are less likely to eat vegetables and to be physically active, when compared with white students.⁸ In St. Louis, African American youth experienced nearly five times the rate of injuries from violence as white students, and 11 times the rate of asthma-related visits to the emergency room (ER).^{9,10}

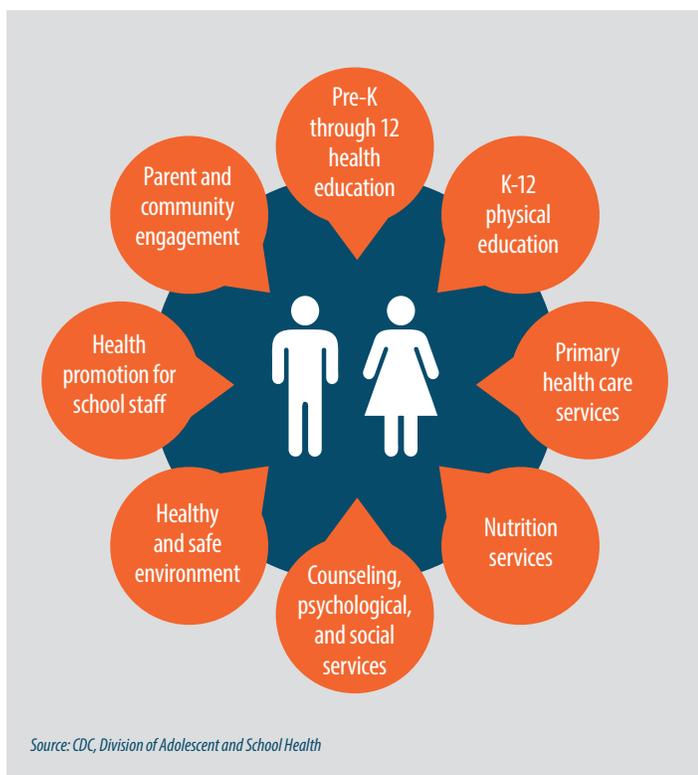
There are also significant gaps in high school completion, school performance, and attendance rates between African American and white students in St. Louis. Poor health contributes to and further widens these achievement gaps, but improving health can help narrow them.

Why focus on schools?

School is where children spend roughly 6 hours a day for 13 years and, therefore, plays an important role in their health and development. School can be a valuable, central point of coordination for delivering health programs. But to do so effectively, schools need support from the community, including families, students, health care providers, faith-based groups, and community organizations.¹¹

The coordinated school health model is a strategy recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to improve both health and learning in schools. A coordinated school health plan consists of eight interconnected components.¹²

Components of a coordinated school health program



Creating a coordinated school health plan can help identify and eliminate gaps in services, prevent duplication, and develop partnerships and improve communication among school health professionals, educators, and families.

By focusing on students' health and well-being, coordinated school health programs can help improve academic success by reducing student absenteeism and dropout rates. Finally, development of a coordinated school health plan helps schools and communities look beyond immediate needs and focus on behaviors that will improve lifelong health.¹¹

School-based health centers

Although not required, a school-based health center or clinic (SBHC) can be a valuable part of a coordinated school health program. Clinics can provide a range of services, including primary care, health screenings, and mental health care. SBHCs are often operated as a partnership between schools and community health organizations. Local examples include:

- The [Mercy Clinic](#) at Roosevelt High School in St. Louis opened in August 2012 as a partnership between Mercy and St. Louis Public Schools.
- The [SPOT](#) (Supporting Positive Opportunities with Teens) is spearheading a new clinic at Jennings High School.

The state of coordinated school health in Missouri

Based on [Missouri's 2014 School Health Profile](#), there was an increase in the percentage of secondary schools that restricted unhealthy foods at school, such as snack foods or high-calorie drinks. However, from 2008 to 2014, there have also been declines in practices that promote school health coordination, leadership, and assessment. For example, the percentage of secondary schools with a school health council experienced a large decline, going from 78% to 56%. Community involvement on school health councils also dropped, going from 78% to 51%. Although a majority of secondary schools reported having a school health coordinator in 2014 (90%), this represents an 8% decline from 2008. These decreases signal areas where improvements may be made to support the health of students across the state.¹³



STRATEGIES

Ensure all schools, particularly those in vulnerable communities, have a coordinated school health program

Schools in vulnerable communities need help from multiple partners. Private-public partnerships are often necessary in order to leverage resources in support of coordinated school health programs. Government, foundations, and businesses can play a key role in advancing policies and efforts at the local and state level. Resources provided by partners (e.g., funding, training, or technical assistance) serve as incentives for schools to adopt and sustain coordinated school health programs.

Students must also be key partners. Young people are valuable resources, and their leadership is essential. Successful coordinated school health programs give students opportunities to get involved, which also helps promote positive youth development.

National examples include:

- The Indiana and Michigan Departments of Education and Health and Great Lakes American Cancer Society worked together to develop the [MICHIANA School Health Leadership Institute](#). The Institute offers training to district teams to help them successfully implement coordinated school health programs, along with ongoing support and technical assistance.
- In 2006, [advocates convinced Tennessee state policy-makers](#) to fund \$15 million to expand coordinated school health throughout the state. Every school in Tennessee was required to conduct the CDC's School Health Index, an assessment and planning tool for coordinated school health. Collaboration and partnership were key elements of this success story.

Local examples include:

- Operated by St. Louis Children's Hospital, [Healthy Kids Express](#) is a mobile outreach program that partners with school districts, day care centers, and Head Start programs to provide screenings, immunizations, and dental care treatment to 20,000 children in our region.



Extend the availability and accessibility of positive youth development programming and safe spaces during out-of-school hours

Investing in youth development programs can provide young people with additional opportunities to develop positive relationships with others, support social and emotional development, and prevent risky behavior. Research also shows that quality out-of-school hours youth development, such as mentoring programs, violence prevention, and after-school and summer programs, can help students achieve academic success.^{14,15} Positive youth development can have an impact on health as well. For example, interventions with a combination of youth development and community service have been shown to reduce sexual risk behaviors for teens.¹⁶



School-based programs that include youth development components have been found to be effective in preventing violent behaviors, by focusing on areas like emotional control, self-esteem and conflict resolution.¹⁷ Improving opportunities for positive youth development can also help create a pathway to better long-term health into adulthood.¹⁸

Local examples include:

- [Big Brothers Big Sisters of Eastern Missouri](#) connects St. Louis youth with volunteers through community-based mentoring and relationship building. Using their proven model, Big Brothers Big Sisters engages with every significant adult in the student's life to provide encouragement and support for the student inside and outside of the classroom. A national study showed that 64% of youth reported higher levels of self-confidence after at least one year in the program, and 58% earned higher grades.
- [Wyman's Teen Outreach Program \(TOP\)](#)¹⁹ is a nationally replicated, evidence-based program used by schools, communities, and youth practitioners to empower teens to lead successful lives and build strong communities. In a 12-year study, participants in TOP showed a 60% lower risk of school dropout, 52% lower risk of school suspension, and 53% lower risk of teen pregnancy.



SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Investments in education and health are some of the best ways to prevent disease and promote health and well-being throughout life.
- Schools play a significant role in the development of our children and can be an important ally in addressing health needs and building healthy habits. But they need the help of all of us in the community, working together, to be successful.
- The CDC recommends a coordinated school health program as a model for improving students' health and well-being, which can improve academic success by reducing absenteeism and dropout rates. Each district should have a coordinated school health program in place, which requires support from leaders, assessment of needs, community participation, and ongoing evaluation.
- Investing in positive youth development programs, inside and outside of school, can also improve health and well-being. These types of programs can increase self-esteem and academic success, reduce risky behaviors, and help youth develop healthy relationships.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 What role do you think schools should play in improving the health of our region's youth?
- 2 What are some of the factors you think make a school "healthy"?
- 3 How would you rate the quality and availability of coordinated school health programs in your community? What opportunities do you see for improvement?
- 4 What do you feel are the priority health needs of youth in your community?
- 5 How do race and socioeconomic background affect access to coordinated school health programs?
- 6 How do you think individuals and organizations in the community can help support coordinated school health programs for all children?
- 7 What do you feel is the greatest barrier to establishing or improving coordinated school health programs in our community?
- 8 What types of resources and support could help to ensure all children have coordinated school health programs?
- 9 Who in the St. Louis community is currently working to improve coordinated school health programs? What organizations/programs are currently helping to address the health needs of our region's youth?
- 10 What would you be willing to do help ensure all children have access to coordinated school health programs?

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Funding for this project was provided in part by Missouri Foundation for Health. The Foundation is a resource for the region, working with communities and nonprofits to generate and accelerate positive changes in health.

ACTION TOOLKIT:

MAY 2015

Investing in coordinated school health for all students

Improving the health of our region's students not only ensures their success in school today, it also creates a foundation for lifelong health and well-being. Coordinated school health programs are a proven and effective tool for achieving these goals. Use the information below to guide your conversations and action around coordinated school health with family, friends, school organizations, government officials, or the media. **Be a thought leader and an agent of change in your community!**

**TAKE ACTION!**
Be part of the solution.**There are many steps you can take to invest
in coordinated school health for all students.**

The success of coordinated school health programs depends on collaboration among school administration, staff, parents, students, and the entire community. If you want to get involved, you may want to start first with your local school or district. Or, you may want to look outward to other schools and districts in the region, particularly those lacking in resources or serving vulnerable students.

Educate and inform:

- Read the companion [Discussion Guide](#).
- Read the *For the Sake of All* brief: [How does health influence school dropout?](#)
- Watch the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation video, [Education: It Matters More to Health Than Ever Before](#), to learn about the connection between education and health, and share with others.
- Explore research on the [link between health and educational outcomes](#).
- Share what you've learned with others. This could be as simple as having a discussion with a friend or colleague. Or bring the message to a larger audience, such as hosting a panel discussion, or giving a presentation to your local parent-teacher organization or school board.

Organize and advocate:

- Identify and promote the use of resources for developing school health policy and for planning and assessing school health programs, such as [CDC's School Health Index](#), [NASBE's Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn](#), and [USDA's Changing the Scene](#). Make these resources available to school districts in the region.
- Meet with school personnel, students, parents, and community members to determine what support (e.g., materials, expertise, time) they can offer to advance the eight components of a coordinated school health program. Or identify how they can support implementation of the [School Health Index](#) process.



- Advocate for coordinated school health programs by writing to or calling your local and state policy makers, such as [Missouri Senators](#) or [Missouri House of Representatives](#).
- Participate in parent-teacher organizations, attend school board meetings, and speak at community forums on the topic of coordinated school health (see *Talking Points* on page four).
- Talk to the administrators in your school district about making school facilities available outside of school hours through [joint-use agreements](#) to promote physical activity opportunities for students and their families.
- Ask local businesses to donate incentives for students, staff, parents, and volunteers to participate in coordinated school health planning and delivery.
- Organize a resource fair that showcases the positive youth development programs that currently exist in your community.
- Write a letter to the editor or op-ed in support of increased funding for coordinated school health programs, developing school-community partnerships to support improving student health, and/or expanding access to positive youth development programming.



Get involved and volunteer:

- Serve on a school health advisory council. If such a committee does not yet exist, volunteer to help organize and develop one to bring together school, student, and community volunteers to coordinate resources, activities, and services. [The Guide to Community-School Health Councils](#) or [School Health Advisory Council Guide](#) can help with this process.
- Serve as a mentor, coaching assistant, monitor, chaperone, or tutor for school health activities and programs.
- Lend your time and expertise to help schools, districts, or community organizations apply for funding to expand coordinated school health programs.
- Volunteer your time with youth organizations that provide youth development or health-related programming outside of school hours. Just a few examples in the St. Louis region include:
 - » [Big Brothers Big Sisters of Eastern Missouri](#)
 - » [Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater St. Louis](#)
 - » [Girls Incorporated of St. Louis](#)
 - » [Girls on the Run](#)
 - » [Mathews-Dickey Boys' and Girls' Club](#)
 - » [Wyman Center's Teen Outreach Program](#)
 - » [YMCA of Greater St. Louis](#)
 - » [Youth In Need](#)

These are just a few of the many organizations in our community working to improve the health and well-being of youth. There are many others who would welcome your contributions of time, talent, or resources.

Of course, health patterns and behaviors begin at home. You can also make an impact by modeling and reinforcing health education messages that are taught in the classroom with your own children at home.



Key components for developing a coordinated school health program



At the center of these efforts is involvement of partners. The most effective coordinated school health programs involve state or local governments, foundations, community organizations, and businesses to manage efforts and maximize resources. Look to partners to provide expertise, funding, training, or technical assistance to support and sustain coordinated school health programs. Also, students should have meaningful involvement in planning and supporting efforts.

Involve partners



Build support

- Engage school administrators and establish a school health council. Identify a point person, like a school health coordinator, who will lead overall direction of efforts. Involve students both in the planning and leadership. Clearly establish the roles council members will play.
- Provide professional development opportunities to equip school staff and council members with the tools and knowledge of coordinated school health. Focus on building leadership, communication, and collaboration skills. For example, see [Building Competencies for Managers and Staff of Coordinated School Health Programs](#), or have staff join a state or national listserv such as [Comprehensive Health Education Network](#) to learn of new training opportunities.



Assess the current environment

- Start by assessing your school's or district's strengths and opportunities for improvement using [CDC's School Health Index](#).
- To help gather support from school administrators, it will be helpful to outline what resources exist and what is currently going on in your district around health. Useful information to gather may include:
 - » Student health status, needs, and health-risk behaviors. Schools can assess health-risk behaviors as well as general health status through formal surveys such as the [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#) and [School Health Profiles](#).
 - » School attendance and academic performance. See [Missouri Department of Education's Comprehensive Data System](#) for data on your school or district.
 - » Talk with others to find out what organizations or programs provide youth with positive opportunities for development, especially those that promote nutrition and physical activity. Check out [CAP4Kids](#) for a list of programs and resources across our region.
 - » See [Funding Coordinated School Health](#) for more information on exploring funding opportunities.



Develop an action plan

- Focus on students. Coordinated school health programs should address the unique health and education needs of students and give students opportunities to build skills, exercise leadership, and form relationships with caring adults.
- Prioritize areas for improvement based on needs of students. Develop a clear plan of how these areas will be addressed – and include a timeline.
- Look to existing programs for guidance. Choose from evidence-based programs that already exist. See [registries of effective programs](#) and check out [guidelines](#) CDC developed to help schools promote physical activity and healthy eating.
- Use multiple strategies. Include a wide range of approaches such as classroom instruction, policies and procedures, environmental changes, health and nutrition services, and parent, student, and community involvement that promote the health and well-being of students.
- Plan for ongoing data collection to inform how the effort is progressing.

Talking points:

- All students in our region deserve the opportunity to be healthy. However, due to race and socioeconomic factors, not all children have access to the same health information, resources, and care.
- Outside of the family, schools play the most significant role in a child's development. Delivering health and well-being programs and services through schools can be an effective way to meet the needs of students, but requires the collaboration of educators, families, and the community.
- Coordinated school health programs can improve student performance, reduce absenteeism and dropout rates, decrease fighting and risky behaviors, and improve cooperation among parents, teachers, and the community. Coordinated school health programs can also help students develop healthy habits that last a lifetime.
- Outside of school, positive youth development programming, such as mentoring programs, community service, and leadership activities, can also have an impact on health. These types of programs support emotional and social development and provide opportunities for youth to develop healthy relationships.
- Positive youth development programs can increase self-esteem, improve academic performance, and reduce violence and risk behaviors, along with helping to instill healthy habits and improve overall well-being.

Use these TALKING POINTS when informing others about investing in coordinated school health.

Resources:

1. [CDC Resources for Coordinated School Health](#) offer statistics, resources, and tips on implementing and improving coordinated school health programs.
2. [Alliance for a Healthier Generation](#) is a catalyst for children's health and works with schools, companies, community organizations, healthcare professionals, and families to transform the conditions and systems that lead to healthier kids.
3. The [Manual for School Health Programs](#) offers tips for developing and evaluating coordinated school health plans, as well as recommended policies and procedures.
4. [Missouri Coordinated School Health Coalition](#) is a collaborative of public and private organizations assisting Missouri's schools, families, and communities with their coordinated school health programs, using the CDC's model.
5. [School-Based Health Alliance](#) is the national voice for school-based health care and serves the school-based health care field by providing technical assistance, resources, and trainings so they can provide the best-quality health care to their patients.
6. [Afterschool Alliance](#) works with public and private partners to increase investments in and access to affordable, quality afterschool programs for students nationwide.
7. [American Graduate](#) is an initiative led by the Nine Network of Public Media to help communities across the country, including St. Louis, engage with teachers, students, their families, and other local stakeholders to address the dropout crisis.
8. [BJC School Outreach and Youth Development](#) partners with schools throughout the St. Louis region to administer K-12 health education and provide youth development resources to the classroom in the areas of nutrition, sexual behaviors, tobacco, safety, physical activity, substance abuse, and career exploration.
9. [Boys and Girls Club](#) provides a safe and empowering space for hundreds of youth to learn, play, and grow every day. Youth involved in their programming can participate in character and leadership development programs, health skills, arts, outdoor recreation, and more.
10. [The Community Guide](#) offers research, systematic reviews, and recommendations on health-related interventions, including school-based and after-school programs.



Sample social media posts:

When using these sample posts, make sure to include a link to the *For the Sake of All* website: <http://forthesakeofall.org>.

- 61% of African American h.s. students in MO are not physically active. Learn how coordinated school health programs can promote health.
- Healthier students are better learners. Find out how you can help invest in coordinated school health programs in our community.
- All students, regardless of race, deserve the opportunity to be healthy. Coordinated school health programs can help.
- Positive youth development programs improve academic success, increase self-esteem & reduce violence – invest today.
- Does your community offer positive youth programming and safe spaces for out-of-school hours? Learn how this can affect health.