

Keep Students Healthy and in School!

Healthy students are more likely to attend school, are better able to focus and stay engaged, and are more likely to be ready to learn.

Below are strategies that districts, schools and community partners can use to help keep students healthy and avoid unnecessary absences from school.

Nutrition, Sleep and Exercise

- Involve students and families in guiding the schools/district's food policy.
- Offer flexible options and encourage families and students to participate in the school's free breakfast and lunch programs.
- Ensure that foods offered outside of school meal programs meet smart snacks criteria.
- Provide access to clean drinking water throughout the day.
- Incorporate physical education into the curriculum.
- Offer regularly scheduled recess.
- Ensure playground equipment is safe and age appropriate.
- Establish later school start times for middle and high school students so they can get the appropriate amount of sleep.



Hygiene

It takes a team approach to encourage these practices so work to ensure appropriate protocols and resources are in place to reduce the spread of germs and create a healthy and safe learning environment. Share messaging (posters, handouts, etc.) with school/district staff and families that reinforce the importance of:

- Hand washing, particularly before eating and after using the restroom.
- Dental hygiene and brushing teeth twice a day.
- Avoiding close contact with individuals who are sick.
- Not sharing cups, utensils, hair brushes or combs.
- Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue, or coughing/sneezing into an elbow.



Safety

- Develop a plan to create a safe and supportive learning environment that helps prevent bullying and allows for inclusion and respect.
- Work with appropriate staff to develop a school or district crisis, emergency and disaster plan.
- Train staff to recognize students in need of mental health supports, and create protocols to connect students and families with appropriate resources.
- If students walk to school, help them find a safe route and encourage walking with a friend. Arrange for a walking school bus, and share this handout to help families create backup plans.



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Wellness

- Share information about available community resources and remind families to visit their health care provider for:
 - A physical once a year.
 - All recommended immunizations, including flu and COVID-19.
 - Addressing chronic health issues such as asthma, diabetes, etc.
 - Dental checkups twice a year.
- Ensure that systems are in place to collect health information and data and share data as needed.
- Support the establishment of school or district health team that regularly assesses school health needs.
- Communicate with families about scheduling non-urgent medical appointments outside of school hours and to return to school if appointments are earlier in the day.
- Determine if families have health and dental insurance. If they don't, connect them with school nurse or social worker.
- Train appropriate school/district staff to work closely with students with disabilities, their families and health care providers to ensure they receive appropriate support and services.
- Work with the local health department to ensure that protocols are in place to address communicable diseases.
- Develop protocols for students with compromised immune systems or those at high risk for complications from common illnesses. These would enable the school or school nurse to create a plan with the family and the child's health-care provider to keep the student healthy and safe while attending school.
- Advocate for adequate nursing and behavioral health supports in every school.
- Invest in improving air quality in school.



Engagement

Students who feel safe and connected to school are more likely to attend every day. This starts with creating a welcoming environment for students and families.

- Support the development of after school activities which can impact a student's overall health and engagement in school.
- Increase supports for children who may be dealing with anxiety or other behavioral health issues.
- Using email, handouts, text or on district/school websites communicate clearly and regularly with families about health-related policies including about COVID-19.
- Support development of educational resources for students who need to stay home due to prolonged illness.
- Keep families informed about their child's attendance and academic progress.

