

Increasing the Delivery of School-Age Children Well-Care Visits and Body Mass Index Screenings through Health Center and School Partnership



Introduction

Health centers play a crucial role in enhancing the health and well-being of school-aged children, providing essential services that ensure early detection and preventive care. Health centers can better support school-aged children through existing and new partnerships with schools.¹⁻³

Annual well-child visits for school-aged children offer health centers the opportunity to assess body mass index, conduct nutrition and physical activity screenings, and provide relevant recommendations. By partnering with schools, health centers can reduce barriers to access and increase well-child visits, body mass index assessments, and physical activity and nutrition counseling. Annual body mass index screenings during these visits allow health centers to ensure that students maintain a healthy lifestyle and to intervene promptly if needed. This universal screening approach leverages each well-child visit to discuss healthy lifestyles, offer prevention strategies to students and families, and implement necessary interventions according to clinical guidance. Well-child visits contribute to improving health center performance across key quality measures for school-aged children, including the Uniform Data System and the School-Based Health Alliance's body mass index performance measures.⁴⁻⁶

This guide contains strategies for health centers in partnership with schools to increase body mass index assessments, and physical activity and nutrition counseling through well-child visits.

Health Center Partnerships

Partnerships bring together complementary resources and expertise to increase access and impact of healthcare and programs. Health centers can partner with education to increase access to well-child visits and body mass index assessments and promote healthy lifestyles for school-aged children and adolescents.



Existing Partnerships with Schools

Partnerships between health centers and schools create transformative results. Bringing healthcare where students spend most of their time, through school-based service sites and school-based health centers, supports student success by removing barriers, including access, lack of insurance, and parents and guardians missing work. Health centers can partner with schools to build trust, communicate, and refer students for well-child visits and body mass index assessments at the main health center locations when a timely school-based exam is not possible.

Health centers can partner with schools to implement healthy lifestyle programs that increase knowledge and behavior change in healthy physical activity and nutrition. Health educators and community health workers at health centers are best positioned to collaborate with schools on these programs.



Tips and Ideas...

- Provide well-child visits at schools on a consistent basis if health center has a school-based service site or school-based health center.
- Collaborate with school staff to identify students missing their well-child visits, particularly school health staff such as the school nurse and school counselors.
- Build buy-in and trust with school staff to support health center efforts. Develop messages for school staff that help them see their essential role in enhancing well-child visits and body mass index screenings that impact education outcomes.
- Create systems for school staff to refer students to the health center for scheduling well-child visits and nutrition and physical activity counseling.
- Deliver school-wide wellness programs such as nutrition and physical activity education in classrooms and creating school gardens.
- Implement or refer to evidence-based intensive behavior modification nutrition and physical activity programs for identified students.
- Meet with school partners to update, plan, coordinate, and problem-solve school-based health care and school-health-related issues and needs.

New School Partnerships

Health centers can launch new partnerships with schools to increase referrals to the health center for well-child visits. This is also an opportunity to partner with schools to implement healthy lifestyle programs as a strategy to “try on” the collaboration. If successful, the partnership will likely grow.



Tips and Ideas...

01

Consider approaching the school district's central office. The school district administrator (often referred to as the superintendent) has the power and authority and holds the final level of support to sign off on the needed agreement(s) between the district and the health center.

02

Contact an individual school to identify a champion with whom to help your health center navigate approval through the district, such as the school nurse, school counselor, or school administrator.

03

Learn about the school district or school’s education goals. Develop messages about how the partnership can support their goals.

04

Create a system for the school to refer students to health center services easily.

05

Identify existing healthy lifestyle programs within the school or district that the health center can build upon.

06

Build upon health centers’ partnerships with community-based organizations to bring additional healthy lifestyle support programs to schools.

07

Develop joint messages with the school partner to build buy-in and trust with parents and guardians to support referrals to the health center.

What do school partnerships make possible for quality improvement in this performance measure....



Partnerships with schools enable health centers to reach current student patients and engage new ones. These collaborations create an additional pathway to ensure youth are connected to health care and receive annual well-child visits, including weight assessments, nutrition, and physical activity counseling. School-aged children who receive care at school-located service sites or school-based health centers are included in health centers' reporting to the Bureau of Primary Health Care through the Uniform Data System. This reporting covers multiple metrics, such as well-child visits and weight assessments with counseling on nutrition and physical activity for children and adolescents.

Tracking the care of school-aged children allows health centers to explore the impact of school partnerships on their performance outcomes, including Uniform Data System and health center-specific goals. This enables health centers to identify strengths and growth opportunities, informing quality improvement initiatives to increase the uptake of well-child visit services, including body mass index screening. Performance data can help health centers demonstrate their reach to young people in their communities and their role in promoting healthy habits by providing nutrition and physical activity counseling interventions based on body mass index screening.

Tips and Ideas...

- Identify current school-aged patients who are overdue for a well-child visit, including weight assessment and physical activity counseling, and leverage or establish school partnerships to bring services to schools where those patients are students.
- Collaborate with school administration where partnerships exist to identify students needing a well-child visit who could become new health center patients and receive school-based services such as a well-child visit, including weight assessment and physical activity counseling.
- Determine if the health center is more effective in reaching some populations for well-child visits, including weight assessment with nutrition and physical activity counseling, than others.
 - Use patient information such as age, race, ethnicity, or gender to explore trends in reach and uptake of services.
 - Engage in quality improvement practices to test and implement changes to reach populations with lower rates of well-child visits and weight assessments with nutrition and physical activity counseling.
- Identify the percentage of well-child visits at the health center or school-based site that do not include weight assessment with nutrition and physical activity counseling.
 - Engage in quality improvement practices to test and implement changes to promote inclusion in services.
- Use data to compare the impact of different intensities of school-based partnerships, such as formal referral systems, once-a-year pop-up clinics, routine intermittent service availability on school campuses, and fully integrated school-based health centers, to determine which has the most positive impact on service receipt among school-aged patients.



NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

Assess all children for the onset of obesity-related risk factors and providing tailored counseling for screening for patient and family stress, disordered eating, and other social determinants of health.⁷

US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF)

Clinicians screen for obesity in children and adolescents 6 years and older and offer or refer them to comprehensive, intensive behavioral interventions to promote improvements in weight status.⁸

Health Center Highlight

Denver Health and the Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do It! Program: The Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do It! Program is a 10-week program for youth and families consisting of classes, homework, and physical activity that has been tested and proven to improve body mass index and health outcomes for youth participants.⁹

In 2015, Denver Health, a health system in Colorado, piloted this program in one of their federally qualified health centers and saw statistically significant outcomes related to their participants' improved body mass index. They have since expanded the program to other health center locations and even held a virtual session to accommodate life changes during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Resource Highlight

- The Quality Counts Clinical Performance Measures QI Toolkit from the School-Based Health Alliance
- SBHC Quality Improvement Toolkit from the School-Based Health Alliance
- Family Healthy Weight Program Implementation Guide from the National Association of Community Health Centers
- Come to the Table: Pediatric Weight Management Series of Best Practice Modules from the National Association of Community Health Centers
- CDC-Recognized Family Healthy Weight Programs from the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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