

A Coordinated Effort to Nurture the Whole Child

Successful student health strategies take a coordinated effort by the whole school and the whole community

SESSION *Utilizing Coordinated School Health Policy Strategies to Promote Student Achievement*
Presenters DPI: Eileen Hare, education consultant; Children's Hospital of Wisconsin: Bridget Clementi, vice president of community health; Katie Harrigan, director of community education and outreach

Keeping students healthy and engaged in order to succeed academically is a constant challenge for schools everywhere. And in order to be effective, strategies can't go half way. There has to be a coordinated effort by the whole school and the whole community to nurture the whole child.

That was the message that Eileen Hare, a physical education and activity consultant with the Department of Public Instruction, and Katie Harrigan, director of community education and outreach at the Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, communicated to school leaders.

Many children are coming to class with "health disparities," ranging from drug use and mental health issues to not enough sleep or inadequate nutrition, even in suburban, affluent districts, Hare noted. Because there is a clear research link between health disparities and lack of achievement, districts are trying to address the issue with a variety of solutions but too often the solutions are isolated from each other and end up being ineffective.

"We have all these different things in our building but they're not very coordinated," Hare said. "How can we combine our efforts?"

The answer is to address the needs of the total child. The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model was developed by the ASCD

(formerly known as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) and is an expansion and update of the Coordinated School Health Approach.

The model makes the child the focal point and is based on five tenets for academic success: the child should be healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged. To accomplish that goal, the model suggests a coordinated effort by the entire school with support from the outside community.

"It's not another program or initiative. It's a framework for school health," Hare said. "It will look different in every district. It will look different in every school environment in a district."

Harrigan discussed the ways the Children's Hospital works as a community partner with schools to support this model. It is a natural extension of the hospital's mission.

"Our vision is to have Wisconsin kids be the healthiest kids in the nation," she said.

The Children's Hospital has partnered with 10 schools in the Milwaukee Public School District that draw from three neighborhoods on Milwaukee's north side. Each school has a school nurse to provide basic medical care for students.

In addition, the partnership has created two separate positions that connect the schools and the



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community. Community health workers or navigators go into the neighborhoods where students live and help residents deal with all sorts of basic issues such as finding a job or dealing with a utility shut-off.

Each school also has a designated school health coordinator to facilitate wellness efforts in the building, identify needs specific to the site, and work with staff to develop an action plan to meet those needs. The coordinator could be a parent or a teacher, Harrigan said.

In surveys of principals and others involved in the effort, there seems to be strong support for the initiative and an agreement on the mission and goals.

Although it is still early, "we feel like we are moving in the right direction," Harrigan said.

Because school staff changes, it is important to "embed" the initiative and make it part of the school culture to be sustained over time, she added. ■