

#1 TIPS FOR CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

What Chief State School Officers Can Do to Support Interagency Collaboration to Improve Health and Academic Outcomes

Common sense tells us and research confirms that children who are experiencing health problems cannot achieve their educational potential. Educators have neither the resources nor the expertise to assume sole responsibility for addressing the health-related concerns that interfere with learning. The chief state school officer supervises the state's public education system and sets the agenda for the department of education's programs and policies. In that role, the chief state school officer can provide leadership for collaboration between the state education agency and the state health agency by ensuring that policies and programs incorporate approaches to keep students healthy so that they can learn. Such collaboration helps both agencies fulfill their missions—the state education agency to ensure that the state's students benefit from their educational opportunities, and the state health agency to ensure that the state's students and their families stay healthy. To develop and maintain effective interagency collaboration that promotes learning and health, chief state school officers can:

- **Promote understanding of education's mission and governance.** Differing agency structures, decision-making processes, stated objectives, and language usage can interfere with the establishment of effective partnerships. The agency leader can help to mitigate such challenges and lay the foundation for collaboration by promoting understanding of the agency's purposes and functioning and their relationship to the health agency's mission and governance. Language differences and jargon have been identified as a major hurdle; the chief state school officer can be sensitive to these differences and seek terminology that has common meaning for both agencies.
- **Meet regularly with the other agency counterpart.** Regular meetings between the chief state school officer and the state health official lay the foundation for communicating effectively, identifying common purposes, and jointly seeking and sharing resources. These meetings model for senior management and staff the importance of collaboration and demonstrate agency leadership's support for interagency partnerships.
- **Develop and disseminate a joint position statement describing the links between health and education, declaring the intention to collaborate, establishing joint goals, and outlining how the collaboration will function.** A statement from the highest level of agency governance demonstrates both agencies' commitment to fostering collaboration and shows agency staff, health and education professionals, lawmakers, and other stakeholders the mutual benefits of health and education working together. Such a joint endorsement can stimulate the identification of opportunities for increasing interagency relationships at all levels and can serve as a model for local agencies to emulate.
- **Designate a member of senior management to oversee school health activities and encourage senior staff to meet regularly (e.g., quarterly) with agency counterparts.** Include this position in the agency's organizational chart to ensure its institutionalization. If a school health section

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or division that incorporates all aspects of health that schools need to address (e.g., health education, HIV/AIDS prevention, physical education, student support services, nutrition, and environment) does not already exist, support the establishment of such a section.

- **Support joint goal setting, (e.g., the alignment of education performance indicators and health objectives, shared administration of funding, and prevention of health risk behaviors such as those that can result in HIV/AIDS infection).** Interagency collaborations seek to achieve shared outcomes. Defining these outcomes requires partners to identify similarities in each other's missions and goals and to use language that both agencies can own and understand. Potential starting points could be joint policy development on issues such as immunization, HIV/AIDS prevention, or tobacco-free environments. At the same time, the roles and responsibilities of each agency must be clearly delineated. Encouraging and allowing shared administration of funding confirms equal responsibility and status among partners.
- **Disseminate within the agency and share with the collaborating agency resources on how health promotion can improve academic achievement.** Develop information briefs that promote the links between health and learning, that describe concrete ways that education programs and policies can incorporate health-related objectives and activities such as HIV/AIDS prevention, and that show how health programs and activities can contribute to student success. Use jargon-free language that both the health and education sectors can understand.
- **Include at least one health indicator, such as attendance, health status, or utilization of services, in state/district/school report cards.** A hallmark of successful collaboration is shared outcomes. Accountability in the form of a health-related indicator affirms the importance of health as an element of the total school program.
- **Support content standards and assessment for health education.** State standards and health-related assessment items provide an incentive for classroom teachers to allot time in the academic schedule for health, including HIV/AIDS prevention, as they do for more traditional topics such as math, science, or language arts. Frequently in today's educational climate, what is not tested is not taught. The Joint Committee for Health Education Standards has developed National Health Education Standards to promote health literacy, which is defined as "the capacity of individuals to obtain, interpret, and understand basic health information and services in ways that enhance health." A health literate person is described as one who can apply to health-related decision making four characteristics that are important education outcomes: (1) critical thinking and problem solving; (2) responsible, productive citizenship; (3) self-directed learning; and (4) effective communication.¹ The Council of Chief State School Officers' State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS) has developed assessment items based on the National Health Education Standards.

Reference

1. Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards. (1995). *Health education standards: Achieving health literacy*. Atlanta: American Cancer Society.