



SBHA Telehealth Recommendations for Education Partners

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrust telehealth into the spotlight. As school districts struggle to meet the needs of their students amidst lengthy closures as well as prepare to reopen, some may consider implementing a school-based telehealth program for the first time. As school-based telehealth program vendors promote their services and products, it is imperative that school administrators have a basic understanding of such programs and what the impact would be for their specific school and school district.

The [School-Based Health Alliance](#), the national voice for school-based health care, offers broad guidance to key questions for consideration.

Who is providing the telehealth program?

Some vendors simply sell equipment, and others offer a comprehensive scope of services, including equipment provision and maintenance, clinical providers, care coordination, billing, technical support, and training. Programs can be for-profit or non-profit and generate revenue in various ways. When considering a program or vendor, it is critical to vet their experience and reputation in the telehealth field and your community.

What is the cost to the school or school district?

There are various start-up costs for a telehealth program, including equipment and technology requirements. In addition to the clinician providing health services remotely, the telehealth model also requires an adult to serve as the “presenter” of the patient. In school-based telehealth programs, this person is typically the school nurse or other school faculty. It is important to establish who can serve in this role, whether they view this responsibility favorably, and if there is a mechanism for reimbursement for serving in this capacity. Other start-up costs may include marketing and obtaining consent from parents. Schools and school districts should explore opportunities for grant funds to help support their program.

What are the service options?

Schools and school districts should seek community input to assess the need and demand for specific health services to be provided via telehealth, including an assessment of all school health services currently provided. Services may include acute issues such as colds and minor infections, primary preventive care including well visits, chronic disease management, and sports physicals, as well as behavioral health, among other services. Schools and school districts should consider the needs of all students, particularly medically underserved and marginalized populations.

Schools and school districts should assess how community providers will integrate into the telehealth program. Some programs invite community providers to participate as telehealth providers, while other programs integrate the community providers into care coordination. Either way, strong connections with community providers are critical. Protocols must be in place to deliver warm handoffs to in-person providers, as needed.

What is the insurance policy environment?

Reimbursement policies for telehealth services vary across public and private insurance, as well as between states. Schools and school districts must understand if Medicaid and other insurers in their state allow schools to serve as the “originating site” or “site of service,” and if so, what the reimbursement rates are. It will also be important to know which entity can bill for the “site fee” – the school or telehealth program. In some states, Medicaid requires the child’s assigned primary care provider (PCP) to provide authorization for another provider to treat the child and seek reimbursement.

Schools and school districts need to know if their state policy landscape is favorable to a school-based telehealth program. State agencies that govern health insurance policies, including Medicaid, should be viewed as partners in expanding health care access and are often able to change unfavorable policies and remove barriers to care. It is important to note that many states have amended Medicaid policies related to telehealth to expand access to care in response to COVID-19. Still, these changes are likely to be temporary.

How will value be measured?

Before considering any new school health program, it is important to consider how value and success will be measured. To show value and gain support, schools and school districts may consider implementing an evaluation to assess return on investment (ROI) and outcome measures such as attendance.

For more information please visit our resources on [telehealth](#) and [COVID-19](#).