

## School-Based Health Center Partnerships

# Planning for Sustainability and Success



To ensure students have access to high-quality healthcare services, school-based health centers (SBHCs) are partnerships between schools and healthcare organizations. The healthcare organization, called a health sponsor, oversees the SBHC's clinical and managerial operations.

A written memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the school district and the health sponsor outlines the level of support and individual/shared responsibilities of operating SBHCs. Note that SBHCs may have more than one health sponsor (e.g., one organization may provide primary care, and a different organization may provide behavioral health services). When multiple health sponsors are involved, the health sponsors and the school district should determine whether a joint MOU or individual MOUs would be more practical and appropriate.

## Typical Health Sponsor Responsibilities

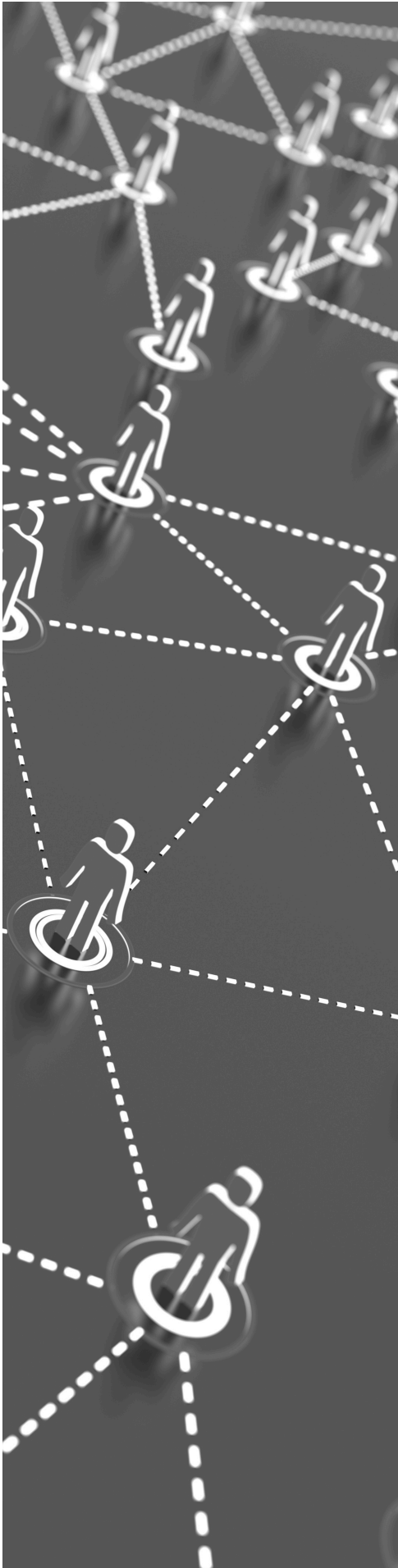
- Employ, supervise, and credential SBHC staff (healthcare providers and support staff)
- Provide malpractice insurance for SBHC providers
- Bill insurers
- Manage the consent process for the SBHC
- Complete and regularly update financial projections for SBHC services
- Provide health information technology infrastructure
- Provide medical equipment and supplies
- Collaborate with school partners to identify opportunities to more effectively serve students and families
- Drive quality improvement
- Conduct outreach for the SBHC
- Lead or participate in the SBHC planning group/advisory committee

## Typical School Responsibilities

- Provide adequate space and utilities for the school-based health center (SBHC)
- Designate a point of contact to liaise with the health sponsor
- Collaborate with the health sponsor to identify opportunities to more effectively serve students and families
- Implement policies that facilitate students' use of the SBHC during the school day
- Participate in outreach activities with the SBHC, including sharing the consent form with families
- Lead or participate in the planning group/advisory committee

## When building partnerships for SBHCs, each partner should consider their readiness, including the elements below:


- **Strong Commitment to Children's Health:** Each partner is committed to developing an SBHC with the primary goal of maximizing children's potential by increasing their access to healthcare at school. If the SBHC will serve non-student populations, the partners are committed to prioritizing the needs and care of students.
- **Leadership Commitment:** School and health sponsor leadership are committed to the SBHC planning process and are willing to identify additional staff members to participate in the planning process and the advisory committee.
- **Mission and Vision:** The school and the health sponsor are aligned in their commitment to implementing an SBHC that offers high-quality preventive and acute care for all students regardless of their ability to pay.
- **Role Clarity:** Each partner understands their role. The school and the health sponsor discuss how the SBHC will work with school nurses, counselors, social workers, psychologists, and other staff who support students.



- **Relationships and Community Trust:** It is crucial that the health sponsor is well-respected and trusted in the community, particularly among families who attend the school where the SBHC will be located.
- **Space for SBHC:** The school and the health sponsor share a commitment to developing a space for the SBHC, either through building new space or repurposing existing space. Alternatively, both partners are willing and able to implement mobile or telehealth services.
- **SBHC Supportive Policies:** The school and the health sponsor are willing to implement policies that facilitate students' use of the SBHC (e.g., allowing walk-in visits).
- **Staff Capacity:** The school and the health sponsor identify staff with interest and capacity to participate in the SBHC planning process, including serving on the SBHC planning group.
- **Commitment to Sustainability:** All partners agree to share data as needed to support SBHC sustainability planning, including aggregate data around SBHC enrollment, utilization, staffing costs, and revenue. The school and the health sponsor each understand their role in working towards a sustainable program.
- **Outreach:** The school and the health sponsor both have willingness and capacity to conduct outreach for the SBHC.


## Common Health Sponsor Types

The nation's **Health Centers**, also known as community health centers or federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), are natural partners in school-based health care. The SBHC principle of ensuring health care access to students who otherwise face barriers to accessing care directly aligns with the Health Center mission of ensuring access to high-quality care for all, regardless of their ability to pay. Health Centers have access to federal grants, enhanced Medicaid reimbursement rates, and other federal safety net protections, which may improve their sustainability. Health Centers are likely to provide an array of services beyond primary care, including behavioral health, oral health, and nutrition services.







**Hospitals** and community health systems often view SBHCs as an opportunity to reduce unnecessary pediatric emergency department visits and to expand access to specialty care. Nonprofit hospitals may be motivated to sponsor SBHCs as part of satisfying their federal non-profit requirements, often referred to as community benefit. To comply with these requirements, non-profit hospitals must invest a portion of their profits back into the community they serve.

The mission and vision of **local public health departments** across the nation is to improve population health. Because SBHCs are located at the intersection of education and health, they are seen as valuable partners in addressing the social determinants of health for children and adolescents. Public health departments view SBHCs as opportunities to support public health by facilitating child and adolescent required school entry immunization compliance, providing sexually transmitted disease testing and treatment services, and increasing health education outreach and prevention.



**Academic medical centers** may view SBHCs as critical opportunities to achieve better health outcomes by providing comprehensive primary care services and continuity of care, as well as increasing care coordination across primary care and specialty providers. In addition to providing care, academic medical centers have a unique focus on innovation and developing research bases for evidence-based health care. They are often strongly embedded in the community, making them uniquely positioned to serve children and adolescents in school. SBHCs sponsored by academic medical centers may also serve as professional training sites for students in nursing, medicine, and dentistry.

## When selecting a school, consider...

-  The **health needs of students and families**, as well as their **access to health services in the community**.
-  The **number of students attending the school**; depending on their health needs, a student population of 750 students can keep a full-time primary care provider busy. Larger student populations may contribute to increased financial sustainability.
-  The **percentage of students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch**. In addition to being one indicator of economic status, in many communities, free and reduced-price lunch eligibility correlates with Medicaid eligibility. Understanding the insurance coverage of students will be important for the health sponsor's financial projections.
-  The **space available for the SBHC project**. Those considering a brick-and-mortar SBHC should ensure that the space is conducive to patient access, comfort, and privacy, as well as provider efficiency (e.g., ideally two exam rooms). For mobile SBHCs, consider the need for planning and coordination for scheduling, timing, and parking. Additionally, the planning process should address logistical considerations (e.g., whether the mobile unit can be used in inclement weather), as well as the need for ongoing vehicle maintenance.

To learn more about the School-Based Health Alliance and school-based health centers, visit our website: [www.sbh4all.org](http://www.sbh4all.org)