The Landscape of Federal K-12 School Health Efforts

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The health of students and staff is central to their abilities to learn and teach, but health is often considered on the periphery of the education system. To improve student and staff health, particularly for those who have faced systemic inequities, we aim to fundamentally shift how school health is integrated and supported in policies and programs at all levels.
Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Framework (WSCC)
State Policies that Support Healthy Schools
School Year 2019-2020
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Introduction
In 2019, Child Trends partnered with the Institute for Health Research and Policy of the University of Illinois Chicago to conduct the State Politics of School Health Study (SPSS) framework for healthy schools. Figure 1. This brief and attached state profiles serve as an update to that seminal analysis, focusing on changes in policies that occurred from September 2017 to September 2019 and expanding our assessment of states' commitment to public health initiatives through codified state policy provisions, statutes, and regulations (e.g., codified state board policies, guidance documents, etc.).

As indicated in our initial report, state policymakers increasingly recognize the inherent role that schools play in promoting students’ physical, mental, emotional, and social health—and all states cover at least some healthy schools topics in codified statutes, regulations, or policies. However, each state varies widely. Figure 2. Some states’ policies are comprehensive. For example, the policies of Nevada, Colorado, and Oregon include three or more domains of the WSCC framework. However, neither our original analysis nor this updated analysis address whether covering a specific topic is effective for improving student outcomes, nor do they address whether having broader or deeper coverage of the WSCC improves effective; these are areas for future study. Wherever possible, we presented our coding in policy documents and other guidance from federal and other non-regulatory sources, as well as in the original research literature, to identify policies that would be most supportive of students’ health. Although some key policies (e.g., nutrition and physical education requirements) have strong

Figure 2. Percentage of healthy schools topics addressed in each state’s codified policies in 2019

Source: NASBHE State Policy Database on School Health (2021) - https://nces.ed.gov/schoolhealth
The current landscape of school district and charter policies that support healthy schools

School Year 2017-18

Elizabeth Bickett-Potter, Rebecca M. Schermeback, Julian Lester, Deborah Temkin,
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These maps show the extent to which state laws and district policies within the 20 selected states (2.1b) have [●] deep (state panel: 0, district panel: 11), [●] broad (state panel: 13, district panel: 8), [●] limited (state panel: 5, district panel: 11), or [●] weak (state panel: 2, district panel: 0) coverage of the 10 Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child domains. States shown in gray were excluded from this analysis.

Figures 2.1a and 2.1b. Breadth and depth of state law (left) and district policies (right) across WSCC domains
The Federal Role in School Health
Research Questions

What federal agencies support school health initiatives and how do they work together?

How do federal school health efforts advance theWSCC?

How do federal school health efforts focus on groups that have faced systemic barriers in health and education?
Types of federal supports

- Formal interagency collaborations
- Formula grant programs
- Discretionary grant programs
- Technical assistance efforts
PRISMA Chart
What federal agencies support school health?
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Funds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EPA</td>
<td>$40.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USDA</td>
<td>$111.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>$119.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HHS</td>
<td>$168.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOJ</td>
<td>$311.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HHS, by subagency:
- HRSA, $10.40
- ACF, $22.80
- SAHMSA, $135.15
How do federal agencies work together?
How do federal efforts advance the WSCC?

- Community Involvement: 26%
- Counseling, Psychological, & Social Services: 32%
- Employee Wellness: 3%
- Family Engagement: 15%
- Health Education: 16%
- Health Services: 14%
- Nutrition Environment & Services: 13%
- Physical Education & Physical Activity: 10%
- Physical Environment: 29%
- Social & Emotional Climate: 42%
How do federal efforts advance the WSCC?
How do federal school health efforts focus on groups that have faced systemic barriers in health and education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-income families/high-poverty communities</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native youth</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-needs/Low-achieving</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military-connected students</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth from historically marginalized racial/ethnic groups</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice-involved youth</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English learners</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless and runaway youth</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBT youth</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

- The U.S. Departments of Education (ED), Health and Human Services (HHS), and Justice (DOJ) each play a central role in federal school health efforts.

- Existing school health-related interagency collaborations lack representation from all relevant agencies.

- Federal efforts to support students’ physical health are largely siloed from those focused on broader elements of school health, such as social and emotional climate.
Summary (continued)

- Few federal school health efforts include a focus on employee wellness.

- Federal school health efforts that make an effort to reach students who face systemic barriers to health and education are limited.
Where we are, where we need to go

- Across federal, state, and local school health efforts, consistent lack of coordination across domains
- Employee wellness largely overlooked as a key factor in school health
- Equity needs to be at the center of school health efforts
Thank you!

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