Overview

In 2010, West Chester University, College of Health Sciences, made a commitment to provide support and an infrastructure for the Pennsylvania Center for Healthy Schools.

The Center for Healthy Schools’ Vision: A core connector that improves the health and academic achievement of children and adolescents is through the alignment of health-promoting school, community, and family environment.

The Center for Healthy Schools’ Mission: Supporting Pennsylvania schools’ children, families, and communities to get and stay healthy by aligning health and learning for the whole child.

The Center for Healthy Schools' urgency:

- Health and learning are inextricably intertwined.
- Compelling case for the causal role that health plays in closing the education achievement gap.
- Healthy school communities provide a consistent message for student health knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

The Center for Healthy Schools is focused on the Vision Planks of:

- Education
- Advocacy
- Sustainability
- Research
The Center for Healthy Schools provides an unprecedented opportunity to create K-12 healthy school communities where students receive consistent health messages and participate in health-promoting activities to support healthy choices and academic success for all Pennsylvania school students.

The following 2014 – 2015 annual report provides an overview of the Center for Healthy Schools’ initiative and highlights work accomplished during the academic school year.

**Introduction**

**Health and learning are inextricably intertwined.** Health problems and risk behaviors of: inadequate diet, physical inactivity, drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, intentional and unintentional injuries, and sexual behaviors which result in HIV/AIDS, STDs, and unintended pregnancy significantly compromise student health, learning, and overall academic achievement. Research in the fields of education and health present a compelling case for the causal role that health plays in closing the education achievement gap.

The nation’s schools are committed to helping all children succeed. Yet, every school day children and adolescents come to school with physical, mental, emotional, and social health issues, which prevent them from fully participating in and benefiting from the efforts of school administrators and teachers to help every child learn and achieve. Health promoting behaviors improve health, increase the likelihood of academic success, and support and promote healthy families and
Coordinated school health is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as a strategy for improving students’ health and learning in our nation’s schools. The healthy development of children and adolescents is influenced by many societal institutions. After the family, the school is the primary institution responsible for the development of young people in the United States.

- Schools have direct contact with more than 95 percent of our nation’s young people aged 5–17 years, for about 6 hours a day, and for up to 13 critical years of their social, psychological, physical, and intellectual development.

- Schools play an important role in improving students’ health and social outcomes, as well as promoting academic success.

The health of young people is strongly linked to their academic success and the academic success of youth is strongly linked with their health. Thus, helping students stay healthy is a fundamental part of the mission of schools. After all, schools cannot achieve their primary mission of education if students and staff are not healthy.

- Health-related factors, such as hunger, chronic illness, or physical and emotional abuse, can lead to poor school performance.

- Health-risk behaviors such as substance use, violence, and physical inactivity are consistently linked to academic failure and often affect students’ school attendance, grades, test scores, and ability to pay attention in class.

The good news is that school health programs and policies may be one of the most efficient means to prevent or reduce risk behaviors and prevent serious health problems among students. Effective school health policies and programs may also help close the educational achievement gap.
Goals of Coordinated School Health

Coordinated school health programs could be a critical means to improving both education performance and the well-being of our young people and the adults they will become. School health programs typically have four overlapping, interdependent goals. These goals are most effectively and efficiently achieved when all the goals are addressed simultaneously through a coordinated approach that purposefully integrates the efforts and resources of education, health, and social service agencies.

The following is a summary of the key goals and strategies:

Increase health knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

- School health instruction helps young people improve their health knowledge. For example, students learn nutrition facts and how to read product labels so they can make healthy eating choices.

- School health instruction helps young people develop related life skills, including communication and interpersonal skills, decision-making and critical thinking skills, and coping and self-management skills. For example, students learn a variety of ways to refuse alcohol or tobacco and practice those skills.

- Improved communication and life skills can positively affect students’ health decisions and behaviors and promote effective citizenship.
Increase positive health behaviors and health outcomes.

- School health programs can be designed to help youth avoid specific risk behaviors, including those that contribute to the leading causes of injury, illness, social problems, and death in the United States; alcohol and other drug use; tobacco use; injury and violence; unhealthy eating; physical inactivity; and sexual risk behaviors. These behaviors, often established during childhood and early adolescence, are interrelated and can persist into adulthood.
- Specific school health interventions have proven effective in significantly reducing these risk behaviors, improving health-promoting behaviors, and improving health outcomes.
- School health programs can also create safer schools and positive social environments that contribute to improved health and learning.

Improve education outcomes.

- Students who are healthy are more likely to learn than those who are unhealthy. School health programs can appraise, protect, and improve the health of students, thus reducing tardiness and absenteeism and increasing academic achievement.
- Students who acquire more years of education ultimately become healthier adults and practice fewer of the health risk behaviors most likely to lead to premature illness and death.

Improve social outcomes.

- School health programs can provide opportunities to build positive social interactions and foster the development of students’ respect, tolerance, and self-discipline. For example, conflict resolution and peer mediation programs help
students learn how to listen and solve problems.

- School health programs can reduce delinquency, drug use, and teen pregnancy, increasing the likelihood that young people will become productive, well-adjusted members of their communities.
- School health programs can provide access to community programs and services that can help students contribute positively to their family, school, and community (www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth).

The Center for Healthy Schools recognizes and supports the link between student health, wellness, and learning. We are committed to working with school administrators, faculty, staff, community prevention partners, and policy makers to create a healthy school community for all Pennsylvania students and families.

The mission and vision of the Center for Healthy Schools is aligned with the “Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child” initiative (CDC, ASCD, 2014).

The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model “provides an important framework to address the collaborative relationship between learning and health.” The whole child approach ensures that each student is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged and sets the standard for comprehensive, sustainable school improvement and
provides for long-term student success. The new model calls for greater alignment, integrations, and collaboration between education and health to improve each child’s physical, social, and emotional development.

The new model includes the (5) tenets of the Whole Child including: Health, Safe, Engaged, Supported and Challenged. The new expanded model includes the home and school community: Health Education, Physical Education and Physical Activity, Nutrition and Environment Services, Health Services, Counseling and Psychological and Social Services, Social and Emotional Climate, Physical Environment, Employee Wellness, Family Engagement, and Community Involvement.

The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model focuses attention on the child, emphasizing a school-wide approach and acknowledging learning, health, and the school as being a part and reflection of the local community. The overarching message of the new model is “Coordinating Policy, Process, and Practice” and “Improving Learning and Improving Health”. Schools have contact with 95% of U.S. children ages 5-17, and schools represent the primary institution responsible for childhood development, after the family. It is critical that schools have an effective and comprehensive school health model in place during these critical years of social, psychological, physical and intellectual development.

(www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth and www.ascd.org)
Building Infrastructure to Create K-12 Healthy School Communities in Pennsylvania

A cornerstone of the Center for Healthy Schools is the Pennsylvania School Health Leadership Institute (SHLI). The SHLI is a professional development opportunity for school administrators, teachers, school nurses, school counselors, parents, school board members, food service providers, and community prevention partners to increase knowledge and skills needed to create healthy school communities.

The SHLI is a 3-day educational experience, which addresses:

- Research documenting the link between student health and learning
- Creating healthy school communities for the whole child
- Policies and practices to align health and learning
- Coordinated school health program model connecting health and learning
- Development and sustainability of K-12 school health councils and district-level wellness advisory committees
• Federal and state legislation and regulations, which guide healthy school communities
• Tools and strategies for needs assessment and data collection
• Steps to create a health improvement plan, including goal setting, outcomes, evaluation, strategies, and resources
• Advocacy for student health and learning
• Implementation, data collection, and evaluation of local wellness policies
• Models of best practice in school wellness
• Professional resources
• Networking and sharing of success and challenges
• Technical support

The SHLI was designed for teams of 3-5 school and community members from the district’s school health council / wellness committee. The Institute is held at West Chester University’s Graduate Business Center with funding and support from WCU’s College of Health Science.
Participating SHLI 2014 schools:

- Avon Grove School District
- Chester County Intermediate Unit
- St. Josephs School, Downingtown
- Great Valley School District
- Pennsylvania Department of Education
- Pennsylvania Department of Health
- Olney Charter High School, Philadelphia
- Penn Alexander Charter School, Philadelphia
- JR Fugett Middle School, West Chester Area School District
- St. Agnes, West Chester
- St. Maximilian Kolbe, West Chester
- William Penn School District

Participants in the SHLI (Summer 2014) attended a follow-up booster session in April 2015. The 2014 School Health Leadership Institute focused on “Creating Safe and Supportive Schools for Student Health and Learning”. School action plans were developed to address school climate, school connectedness, and social and emotional learning.
The purpose of the SHLI Booster Session (April 2015) is for schools to share the results of their action plans and highlight successes and best-practice strategies. Each team received a Healthy School Zone banner for their school and a certificate of completion documenting their commitment to student health and learning.

Due to low enrollment the Summer 2015 School Health Leadership Institute was cancelled. A Fall 2015 one day theme workshop (Creating Safe and Supportive Schools) and a Spring 2016 one day theme workshop (Implementing School District Wellness Policies to promote healthy eating and physical activity) are planned for the 2015 – 2016 school year.

School Health Leadership Institute Success Stories

- Review and restructuring of all middle school committees related to student health, wellness, and learning including: Safety Committee, Wellness Committee, School Climate Committee, and Equity Committee. Created one school wide council

(Changes: Caring Culture/Climate; Healthy Habits; Amazing Attitudes; Non-
Judgmental Environment; Geared for Growth; Empathetic Environment; and Safe and Supportive Schools)

- Conducted the CDC School Health Index
- Physical Activity Programs including running and walking clubs, Labyrinths/Peace Paths
- Universal Free Breakfast
- Brain Breaks
- Anti-Bullying Programs
- Peer and support groups for students, grief counseling and support for LGBT youth
- Student and Staff physical activity programs, games, competitions
- Increased school security including cameras, key cards, Raptor System, Safe Environment Training for Volunteers, Healthy Snack Options and Healthy Breakfast treats, Instruments of Peace Program, Grade 5 Healthy Futures program.

Center for Healthy Schools Success Stories:

During the 2014 – 2015 year, the Center for Healthy Schools partnered with and received funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Campbell’s, the WCU College of Health Sciences, and the Pennsylvania Department of Health to support schools in Pennsylvania and Camden, NJ to create healthy school communities. The projects address:
• Pennsylvania Department of Education / Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Promoting Adolescent Health Through School-Based HIV / STD and Teen Pregnancy Prevention)

• Campbell’s Healthy Community Initiative (Healthy Sites Network to support healthy eating, physical activity and reduce childhood obesity in Camden city schools and community)

• WCU College of Health Sciences (Partnership with WCU student athletes and CASD middle schools to design social media bullying prevention messages).
• Pennsylvania Department of Health (Partnership to provide professional development to K-12 Health and Physical Education teachers with the focus on maximizing vigorous physical activity (SPARK), creating an infrastructure to support wellness policies and action planning for healthy eating and physical activity, and designing assessment strategies to effectively measure student learning in K-12 physical education.
Thank you to the Center for Healthy Schools Advisory Board 2014 – 2015 for partnering with us to meet our vision for creating healthy school communities for all Pennsylvania students.

Center for Healthy Schools Advisory Board 2014 - 2015

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Special Notes:

The Center for Healthy Schools needs assessment executive summary strategic plan and annual reports are located on our website at www.wcupa.edu/centerforhealthyschools.

Please visit our Facebook page for professional development opportunities, and resources at https://www.facebook.com/pages/Center-For-Healthy-Schools/111482822292933!