

How to Work with Schools on Health Outreach and Insurance Enrollment: Tips for Community Partners

As a community agency, you may be wondering how to present your issue to schools and how to engage the leadership of your local school district in outreach and health insurance enrollment activities. Organizations, including yours, emerge and change through strong leadership. School systems can be politically-charged and hierarchically structured. As a potential partner, it is important to understand the politics and respect the hierarchy. In school districts, the overall leadership responsibility falls squarely on the shoulders of the superintendent. Research has shown that if the superintendent is on board with a program it is more likely to be implemented and sustained. So how do you present your issue to the leadership of school districts so that it becomes meaningful for them, adds value, and gets you in the door?

- Consider the impact that your program will have on what the school district cares about – learning and achievement. Your district’s goals and objectives are available to the public on their website so download and review them prior to any initial meeting. Link what you want to do to the priorities, policies, and needs of the district and/or show how your partnership will provide a solution to a district concern. For example:
 - School districts receive funds from their state based on Average Daily Attendance. So phrase your top concern as a top concern of theirs, e.g., a child who is sick and not in school impacts the school district’s budget. Health insurance provides students access to a primary care giver or primary place to receive preventive and treatment services and is an excellent strategy to ensure that students are healthy, in school, and ready to learn.
 - Talk to school district leaders about the strong link between health and education and point out that they now have access to financial support to address health issues. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is a federal law passed in December 2015 that governs the K–12 public education policy in this country. In the law, health has been elevated and defined as a contributor to a “well-rounded education.” Schools and districts will have access to funding under Title I and Title IV of this law and they can apply to their state for funding on a wide range of issues, including those related to student health and wellness and parent engagement. Also mention the 2014 [Medicaid rule change by the Center on Medicare and Medicaid Services \(CMS\)](#) that allows public schools to receive funding for health services they provide to eligible students. Called the free care rule, its reversal expanded the ability of schools to be reimbursed as Medicaid providers for supplying free care to students.
 - School districts are held accountable by policymakers and taxpayers to create rigorous academic standards, measure student progress against those standards, and attach some consequence to the results. Discuss your program’s potential to impact the school district’s accountability system and performance towards state standards. Under ESSA, the U.S. Department of Education will continue to require annual standardized tests, but is focused more on overall and student subgroup performance. A child not in school because of an undiagnosed or untreated illness stands a limited chance 1) of being successful in

school, 2) of making progress toward graduation; and 3) of scoring well on standardized achievement tests, which can negatively impact the district's achievement profile, funding, and control.

- Discuss your program's benchmarks, i.e., the set of standards you will use as a point of reference for evaluating performance or level of quality. Schools districts want to do "what works" and seek quality programs that can provide data to indicate progress.
- Learn more about FERPA, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, assuring the school district about your concern for and preparation to ensure student data privacy. Also talk to them about HIPPA, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, about which schools may not be as familiar.
- School districts build their budgets and plan initiatives in the spring for the following school year. If you want to partner with schools on an outreach and enrollment campaign that starts at the beginning of a school year, you need to be talking to those districts by the beginning of March the school year before.
- Involve school district personnel in planning. Capitalize on the skills, talents, and dedication of teachers and principals at the school level. You will need their buy-in and their engagement can improve upon and smooth the way for your program.
- Work through the system, not around it. This may involve red tape, bureaucracy, and paralyzing union regulations, but it's worth it to you to do it right.
- Enlist youth and parents as champions.
- Be flexible.
- Realize that what you hope to accomplish may take at least twice as long as you wish.
- Never give up.

