

Four Strategies to Fund a Healthy School Environment

The coronavirus outbreak puts schools and districts in a financial double bind: They must spend more money to provide technology, training, and protective equipment to support student health. At the same time, local and state governments that support education are experiencing sharp declines in revenue.

Despite these challenges, keeping health at the center of teaching and learning is crucial. Here are four strategies you can employ to support the health of students, teachers, and staff in your school community.

Consider these strategies when thinking about how to gain access to additional funding to support a healthy school environment, whether learning takes place in-person or virtual.



1. Explore the availability of federal aid for COVID-19 recovery

Congress has allotted billions of dollars and created regulatory flexibility to support schools amid the coronavirus crisis. These include:

- ❑ **CARES Act dollars allotted by Congress to support student health.** Approved by Congress in late March, the [CARES Act](#) provides \$13.2 billion for K-12 schools with a broad range of [allowable health-related uses](#), from buying equipment for cleaning and sanitizing to providing mental health service and support. With the bulk of these dollars yet to be spent, local education leaders should convey their priorities to state education leaders and governor's office officials distributing the money.
- ❑ **Future legislation to promote student health needs.** With the impact of the coronavirus crisis unabated, Congress is likely to continue providing emergency dollars for K-12 schools. Local education leaders can inform the debate by sharing school health priorities with members of Congress and state leaders.
- ❑ **Relaxed school meals rules to provide nutrition.** The U.S. Department of Agriculture [relaxed its rules](#) on school meals, allowing families to pick up food or receive deliveries at locations beyond the schoolyard, and allowing community organizations to receive federal reimbursement for the support they provide through September 2021.



2. Tap existing federal education funding sources

Federal education and social services laws includes several mechanisms for supporting student health. These include:

- ❑ **Funding for children living in poverty.** [Title I](#) of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) delivers more than \$15 billion annually to improve “the academic achievement of the disadvantaged.” The funding can be used for health services, including counseling and mental health services. The bulk of the Title I dollars are delivered based by formula, but local education leaders have a say in how their money is spent.
- ❑ **Grants for safe and healthy schools.** [Student Support and Academic Enrichment](#) grants are designed to pay for three priorities: providing access to a well-rounded education, improving the use of technology and ensuring safe and healthy students. These grants, part of ESSA’s Title IV, are administered by the states. District leaders can shape grant applications to pay for nutritional and physical education, mental health services, bullying-prevention programs and other school health priorities.
- ❑ **Grants for community schools.** [Full-service community schools](#) can deliver a range of health and social services for children and families into the school buildings, creating collaborations with community health providers and public agencies. School and district leaders can seek grants as part of ESSA’s Title IV to pay for site resource coordinators at these schools.
- ❑ **Support for children and mothers.** [Title V](#) of the Social Security Act provides a stream of funding for the health of mothers and their children, particularly for preventive or primary care for children and children with special health care needs. Local leaders can work with state authorities to explore ways to use Child and Maternal Health Services Block Grants to support student health.



3. Expand Medicaid reimbursement to schools

With 37 percent of school-age children benefitting from Medicaid and CHIP, the federal-state partnerships can help pay for health services provided through school. Schools and districts should:

- ❑ **Determine whether the services provided are eligible for reimbursement.** Medicaid reimburses an estimated \$4.5 billion in school-based health services every year. While Medicaid payments were initially reserved for services for students with disabilities, a 2014 regulatory change allowed for [much broader use](#) including for school nurses, counselors and mental health providers serving all eligible students. Local leaders can [check to see](#) if the state has broadened its rules. If it hasn’t, they can push for legislative or regulatory change.
- ❑ **Address challenges to billing for eligible services.** Many schools and districts, particularly those in rural areas, fail to bill Medicaid because of the program’s complex rules required for reimbursement, [a survey](#) by The Superintendents Association found. School and district leaders can consider circumventing these red tape challenges by partnering with a health clinic or hospital that can handle billing.
- ❑ **Explore ability to bill for telehealth.** Amid the coronavirus pandemic, federal regulators [eased up rules](#) allowing Medicaid and CHIP reimbursement for telehealth services and allowing payment for any services previously being reimbursed in person. School and district leaders can use this moment to expand telehealth capabilities.



4. Collaborate with local nonprofits and other organizations

The partners that schools rely on to support students and families can also help navigate the coronavirus crisis. These include:

- ❑ **Local community-based organizations.** Local nonprofits and organizations can support school health by providing protective equipment for students and staff, additional space and staffing to for social distancing when school reopen, and counseling services for students and families. Education leaders can partner with these nonprofits to seek grant funding.
- ❑ **Local Philanthropy.** Many community foundations are shifting their funding priorities to support COVID-19 recovery. School leaders should reach out to local philanthropists to make the case for school-health initiatives.
- ❑ **American Academy of Pediatrics chapters.** The AAP is partnering with the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families [on a project](#) to educate the public and policymakers about the impact of the pandemic on children, including limited access to care, declining vaccination rates, and delayed identification and treatment of health problems. School leaders can reach out to local pediatricians to connect with this collaborative initiative.

Resources

- ❑ H.R. 748 – CARES Act, U.S. Congress, 2020 <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/748/text#toc-H40760A10ED8F4737AA5B968A88ADB03F>
- ❑ How Medicaid and CHIP Can Support Student Success Through Schools. Georgetown University Center for Children and Families, 2019. <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2019/04/24/how-medicaid-and-chip-can-support-student-success-through-schools/>
- ❑ Keeping Kids Connected to Care During COVID 19, 2020. Georgetown University Center for Children and Families and American Academy of Pediatrics <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2020/08/05/keeping-kids-connected-to-care-during-covid-19/>
- ❑ State Medicaid & CHIP Telehealth Toolkit, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2020 <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/benefits/downloads/medicaid-chip-telehealth-toolkit.pdf>
- ❑ Structural Inefficiencies in the School-Based Medicaid Program Disadvantage Small and Rural Districts and Students. The Superintendents Association (AASA), 2019. https://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Policy_and_Advocacy/Resources/AASA_Medicaid_Report_FINAL.pdf
- ❑ USDA Extends Free Meals for Kids Through December 31, 2020, USDA <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2020/08/31/usda-extends-free-meals-kids-through-december-31-2020>
- ❑ What Congressional Covid Funding Means for K-12 Schools. FutureEd, 2020 <https://www.future-ed.org/what-congressional-covid-funding-means-for-k-12-schools/>
- ❑ A Guide to Expanding Medicaid Funded School-Health Services, Healthy Schools Campaign, 2019. <https://healthyschoolscampaign.org/resources/single/a-guide-to-expanding-medicaid-funded-school-health-services/>
- ❑ Practical Guide for Financing Social, Emotional, and Mental Health in Schools <https://cachildrenstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/practicalguide.pdf>