

# How Schools Can Support Student and Family Health Coverage: Aurora Public Schools



## Overview

Schools can play a key role in ensuring students and their families enroll in and maintain health care coverage. This is more important than ever as children and families enrolled in Medicaid no longer have the continuous coverage they had during the pandemic. As of April 2023, states have resumed reviewing eligibility for all people enrolled in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to ensure they still qualify. This "unwinding" could result in over 5 million children across the country losing their health insurance coverage. It is important for anyone involved in health insurance enrollment efforts to understand how schools can help students and families stay covered.

Health coverage for students supports not only their health, but their academic achievement as well. Research has demonstrated increased access to health coverage is linked to improvements in test scores and fewer missed days of school, especially for students in low-income households. In addition, enrollment in Medicaid creates an opportunity for school districts participating in their state's school Medicaid program to increase revenue from billing for eligible health services.

This case study highlights Aurora Public Schools' (APS) work to ensure students and families in Aurora, Colorado stay covered, and offers lessons learned for other school districts and partners across the country seeking to bolster the role schools play in this important work.

## Aurora Public Schools: Medicaid and CHP+ Outreach and Enrollment

The Medicaid Department at Aurora Public Schools is committed to keeping students healthy and in the classroom. A key component of that work is ensuring students and families have health coverage. APS is state-certified as an Application Assistance Site and Presumptive Eligibility site and is listed on the state website as a health coverage enrollment center. This allows APS to immediately process emergency applications for temporary health coverage.

Five of the APS Medicaid department's six employees are certified to support families in enrolling in Health First Colorado (the state's Medicaid program) and Child Health Plan Plus

### APS Student Population Snapshot

- 38,000 students enrolled in preschool-12
- Students come from more than 130 countries and speak over 160 different languages
- 74.6% of students receive free or reduced-price lunch
- 14.5% of students receive special education services and supports

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(CHP+). CHP+ offers low-cost health insurance for children and families that earn income too high for Medicaid but who cannot afford private insurance.

In addition, APS has developed a partnership with the county health department. The school district pays 1/3 of the salary of a county employee to process APS' Medicaid and CHP+ applications and be available to answer questions from staff and families. This partnership helps streamline the application process for APS families and further enables APS to build trust and respect with the families they serve.

### *APS' Medicaid Family Liaisons*

APS Medicaid department's six staff members, include two Medicaid Family Liaisons who are key to the success of APS' outreach and enrollment work. The liaisons assist families in the Medicaid and CHP+ application process. They are regularly out in the communities they serve. They attend school events such as back to school nights and health fairs to provide on-site enrollment support. The liaisons also schedule one-on-one appointments at schools to support families in completing the Medicaid/CHP+ application; help with the renewal and reenrollment process; and connect families to additional resources such as dental services, eye exams and food assistance. The APS Medicaid Family Liaisons build trust with APS families and strong relationships with key partners are key to the success of their work.

### *Funding*

APS' outreach and enrollment work is funded through the district's participation in the state's school Medicaid program. The state's school Medicaid program reimburses the school district for eligible services delivered to Medicaid enrolled students. The district is reimbursed nearly \$7 million through its participation in this program.

### *Supporting Post-Pandemic Medicaid Reenrollment*

Outreach and enrollment are now more important than ever as there is a need to support families through the post-pandemic Medicaid enrollment process. APS is implementing a strategic communications plan to ensure school staff and families understand the need to renew health coverage and steps that can be taken to do so. This includes social media posts, email blasts, text messages, and printed flyers. In addition, Medicaid Family Liaisons attend in-person meetings with key school staff to share information about enrollment and create family testimonials about the importance of enrollment. APS is hiring two additional Medicaid Family Liaisons to support these activities and expand the department's reach overall.

### **Impact of APS Medicaid & CHP+ Enrollment for SY 2022-2023**

- 197 new client applications
- 594 new children enrolled
- 119 new adults enrolled
- 147 Medicaid renewals

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## Lessons Learned from APS

The outreach and enrollment work at APS offers districts many lessons on how to support families in enrolling in and maintaining health coverage:

- **Leverage existing communications channels and routine school events** (e.g., social media, text messages and robocalls to families, newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, back-to-school nights, health fairs) to share information with families about enrollment in health coverage. It is also critical to ensure outreach materials and engagement strategies are culturally sensitive and available in languages that reflect the populations served within the school community. Check out APS' Medicaid Department's [website](#) and [Facebook page](#) for examples of their communications with families about Medicaid reenrollment.
- **Collaborate with on-site school staff to support enrollment efforts.** APS' Medicaid Family Liaisons collaborate with school staff serving students. They build strong partnerships with secretaries, teachers, nurses and mental health providers to support their work. These staff can play a crucial role in identifying and supporting outreach to family. In addition, APS works closely with the school-based health clinics serving their families to emphasize the importance of children's health coverage and well-being.
- **Consider having staff with expertise in health and wellness and/or community engagement get certified as Medicaid enrollers by your state.** This could also include having your school district certified by your state as a designated enrollment site. You can learn more about Colorado's process [here](#).
- **Find out whether your school district participates in your state's school Medicaid program.** If so, consider using the Medicaid funds to hire staff to lead outreach and enrollment efforts. Learn more about the school Medicaid program in your state [here](#).
- **Consider building formal agreements with other child- and family-serving county agencies and partners** to collaborate on Medicaid reenrollment and other social services, such as APS' strategy of paying for 1/3 of a county staff member's time to process applications.

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