

SBHC Community and Stakeholder Engagement



Community trust and school-based health center (SBHC) impact will increase with thoughtful engagement of the school community and other key stakeholders in SBHC planning and operations. Engagement with students, families, school staff and other stakeholders in the SBHC planning phase is important so needs are understood, voices are heard, concerns are addressed, community priorities and champions are identified, and the resulting SBHC ultimately meets the needs of the students and families in the community. This may be critical to the SBHC's success and sustainability over time.

There are a variety of community engagement frameworks that may be helpful to consider, including this [continuum of community engagement](#), from a diagram originally drawn by the International Association for Public Participation.

Keep equity front and center. In all SBHC planning activities, consider how to intentionally engage and identify the needs of those in your community most impacted by health and educational inequities. Those most impacted may include students and families of color and those who are low-income, experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ+, English language learners, immigrants, refugees, or those with disabilities. Some families may be less able to attend after-school events or meetings due to work schedules. Some families may be less able to access information if it is only available in English or if it is only available online. Target outreach to harder-to-reach students and families, directly or through key school support staff who are in regular contact with families.

Key SBHC stakeholders include:

- **Youth:** Students are the primary clients of the SBHC and have valuable stories and information to share about their needs, priorities, and personal experiences. Middle and high school students can be great SBHC champions and create word-of-mouth demand for SBHC services.
- **Parents/guardians:** Parents/guardians can provide critical information about their children's and family's health care needs. They are influential in their children's use of the SBHC (key at the elementary school level), and they are critical partners in their children's health at home.
- **School staff:** All school staff—the school nurse, counselor, psychologist, social worker, family support worker, teachers, coaches, and administrative staff, among others—have valuable insight about students' needs, want to know how the SBHC will complement current school services, and can be an important source of referrals to the SBHC.
- **School administrators:** The school principal and other administrators are key to engaging families and advocating for the SBHC. They may champion the SBHC to the school board, participate in developing collaborative agreements and practices with the SBHC sponsor, identify physical space at the school for SBHC operations, provide facilities support to the SBHC (building access, utilities, etc.), and promote SBHC referrals and utilization.

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- **Community-based organizations:** Organizations that serve children, youth, and their families within the school and the community—such as those providing tutoring, after-school programs, social services, and other supportive resources—can be important partners in SBHC planning and operations.
- **Healthcare sponsor and other providers:** A healthcare entity or other community-based organization that is able, willing, and trusted in the community to sponsor the SBHC will need to be identified. The SBHC sponsor may be a community health center (federally-qualified health center, or FQHC), community clinic, hospital or healthcare system, local public health department, tribal health agency, or other community-based organization.

It is important as well to communicate to other health care providers in the community that the SBHC will collaborate with them to provide coordinated care to shared patients. Involving health care professionals at the start of your planning efforts will help build a strong foundation for care coordination and communication with primary care and specialty care providers serving children, youth, and families in the community.

- **Public health officials:** Local public health jurisdictions can provide public health data and advocacy to inform other stakeholders. They can advise on the types of SBHC services which would benefit the community and in some cases be key partners in providing care. Some local public health departments may have the capacity to sponsor the SBHC directly or support the SBHC with services such as immunizations.
- **Legal counsel and risk managers:** Having early discussions with legal counsel and risk managers for both the school district and SBHC sponsor will ensure everyone is on the same page and pave the way for drafting legal agreements that define, for example, the use of space, the SBHC collaboration, roles and responsibilities, and parameters around student confidentiality and information-sharing in compliance with FERPA and HIPAA.
- **School board:** The school board may need to review and approve moving forward with SBHC planning and implementation at various stages, district funding contributions, and/or district policies that affect SBHC operations.
- **Community leaders:** Community leaders critical to building support for the SBHC may include business owners, civic clubs, elected and appointed officials, faith leaders, local reporters, or other influential people in your community. Seek allies who are representative of the community and its diversity.

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Stakeholders can be engaged in SBHC planning and implementation at various levels, for example:

1. **SBHC planning / steering committee.** Regular planning meetings between key stakeholders—including for example school administration, the school nurse and counselors, the prospective SBHC sponsor, student and family representatives—will allow for open dialogue about needs identified, the SBHC model and services to be provided, the collaboration, key questions and next steps.
2. **Community / youth advisory board:** As champions among students, parents/guardians and the community are identified, consider forming a community and/or youth advisory board to inform SBHC services and promote SBHC utilization longer-term. Advisory boards can help with the planning process and continue to guide, support, and inform the SBHC once it is operational.
3. **Community meetings:** During the planning process, consider holding community meetings to explain the vision and mission of the SBHC and respond to community questions and concerns. Plan ahead, have key data and needs assessment results ready, and have key stakeholders and champions attend meetings to respond to questions from the community. Have the proposed health care sponsor introduce themselves and their practice. If the proposed sponsor is not already operating a SBHC elsewhere, consider having someone present who can speak to a common SBHC model of care. The proposed sponsor and steering committee might be prepared to address, at a high level, common questions around how parents/guardians will be involved in their students' care, Washington's minor consent laws, and care coordination with other health care providers in the community. If meeting participants have further, detailed questions on these or other topics, you might offer to follow up separately after the meeting.
4. **Communication with broad community:** Developing a communication plan for the school board, school staff, students, families, other community members and community health providers will help ensure that everyone is receiving consistent messaging about the SBHC collaboration as it develops, the SBHC model of care, and SBHC services that will be provided. The communication plan might include noting and documenting responses to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) that the SBHC sponsor and the school administration are receiving in their interactions with key stakeholders.