

# Bridging Gaps: School Absenteeism and Equity through Collaborative Care

Julie Incitti, MSW, CAPSW  
School Social Work Consultant

Linda Hall, MPA  
Director - Office of Children's Mental Health



# Your Presenters


## **Julie Incitti, MSW, CAPSW**

Julie Incitti is the school social work consultant at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Her areas of focus include best practices in school social work practice, professional ethics and boundaries, mandated reporting, supporting students involved with the child welfare system, attendance/truancy, pupil records, comprehensive school mental health systems, and trauma-sensitive schools.

## **Linda Hall, MPA**

Linda Hall is the Director of the Office of Children's Mental Health. Linda Hall serves as the Director of the Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health (OCMH), where she leads statewide efforts to enhance the mental well-being of children and families. Her career has been dedicated to children's health and mental health policy, with experience at the National Governors Association, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and the Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies

# Disclaimer

- We have no relevant financial relationships with the manufacturer(s) of any commercial product(s) and/or provider(s) of commercial services discussed in this CME activity.
  - We do not intend to discuss an unapproved/investigative use of a commercial product/device in my presentation.
- 

# Learning Objectives

As a result of this workshop, participants will be able to

- Describe factors that contribute to school absenteeism and truancy, including how absenteeism disproportionately impacts students of color and students in poverty.
- Discuss the impacts of regular school attendance on wellbeing with families and incorporate this discussion into appointments.
- Maximize collaborations with schools when student have health conditions to improve outcomes.
- Explain to families when an evaluation for a 504 Plan or IEP would be appropriate and how to engage schools in this process.

# What Are We Talking About?

## Truancy

One part or  
whole day  
unexcused

## Habitual Truancy

Five part or  
whole days in a  
semester  
unexcused

## Chronic Absenteeism

10% of school  
days with  
unexcused or  
excused absence

# Factors Contributing to Absence



## COMMUNITY

- Unsafe path to/from school
- Transportation issues
- Financial, social, medical or other barriers



## SCHOOL

- Bullying
- Pressure for academic success
- Unwelcoming/unsafe school climate
- Poor ventilation



## FAMILY

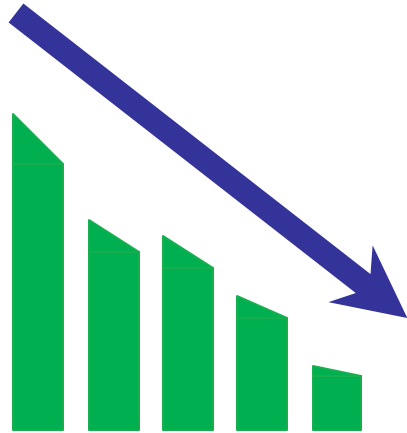
- Housing/ food insecurity
- Conflicting family responsibilities/ obligations
- Believing absences are no problem



## STUDENT

- Unmet mental health needs
- Chronic health conditions (eg asthma)
- Frequent school changes
- Substance abuse

# Absences Matter - Academics

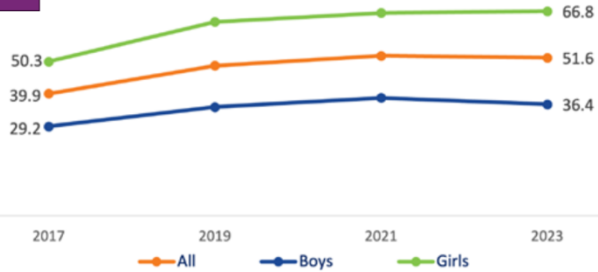


- Absenteeism in K and 1st grade are at a greater risk of not being able to read by 3rd grade
- Absenteeism in 6th grade a better predictor of drop out than test scores
- Absent students score lower on national skills assessments

# Absences Matter – Mental Health Impacts

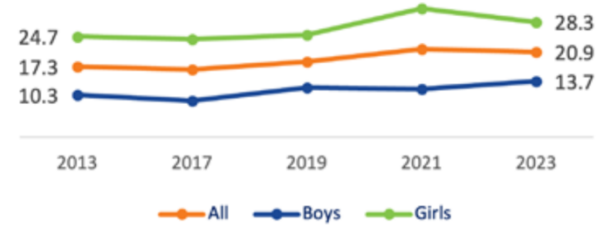
29%

**Anxiety**  
Among Wisconsin High School Students



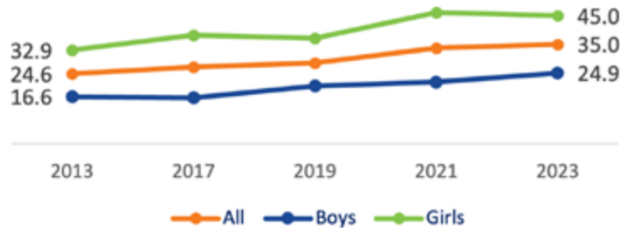
21%

**Self-Harm 10-Year Trend**  
Among Wisconsin High School Students



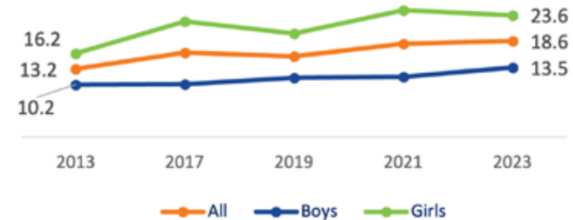
42%

**Sad and Hopeless 10-Year Trend**  
Among Wisconsin High School Students



41%

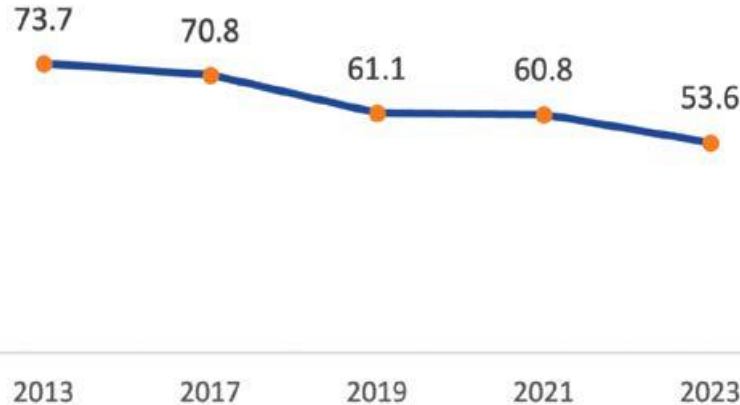
**Seriously Considered Suicide 10-Year Trend**  
Among Wisconsin High School Students





# Absences Matter - School Belonging

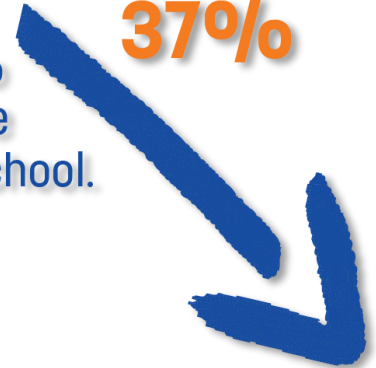
**School Belonging 10-Year Trend**  
Among Wisconsin High School Students



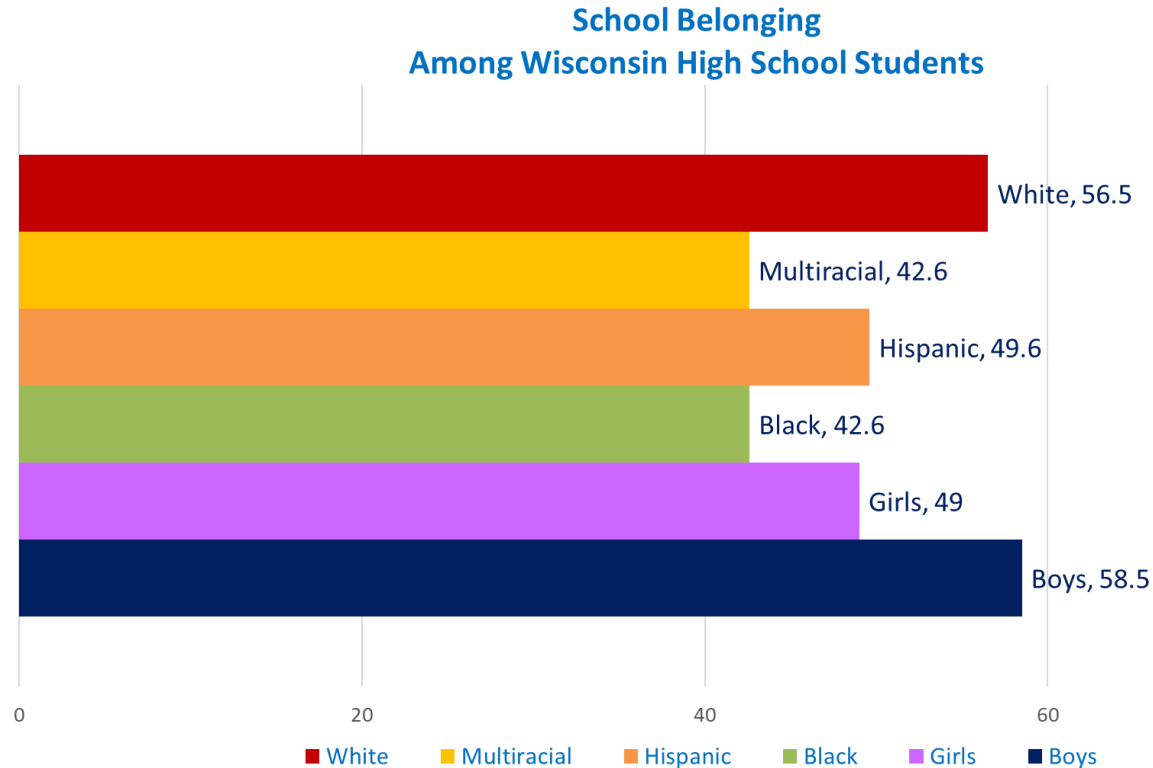
## BELONGING

In the last 10 years  
there has been a 37%  
drop in kids feeling like  
they belong at their school.

**37%**



# School Belonging By Group



# Importance of School Belonging

**School connectedness has substantial protective impact during adolescence and extends into adulthood.**



Feeling you belonged at school reduced, *in adulthood*:

- emotional distress and odds of suicidal ideation
- physical violence victimization and perpetration
- multiple sex partners
- Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) diagnosis
- prescription drug misuse, and other illicit drug use.

# Absences Matter - Health



- Attendance linked to positive adult health outcomes
  - Less likely to smoke and more likely to exercise
- Attending students have fewer experiences of teenage pregnancy, violence, unintentional injury, and suicide attempts
- Advanced degrees associated with reduced mortality risk

# Chronic Absenteeism as a Vital Sign

## Vital Signs for Pediatric Health: Chronic Absenteeism

Sara B. Johnson, PhD, MPH, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine; Anne Edwards, MD, American Academy of Pediatrics; Tina Cheng, MD, MPH, Cincinnati Children's Hospital; Kelly J. Kelleher, MD, MPH, Nationwide Children's Hospital; Jennifer Kaminski, PhD, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities; and Erin G. Fox, MPA, MPH, The Ohio State University

June 26, 2023

This paper is part of a series on pediatric vital signs. The other selected measurements in this series include infant mortality, school readiness, and high school graduation. These papers can be found at <https://doi.org/10.31478/202306a>, and <https://doi.org/10.31478/202306b>.

### Introduction

In 2015, the Institute of Medicine (now the National Academy of Medicine) released the report *Vital Signs: Core Metrics for Health and Health Care Progress* as a “basic, minimum slate of core metrics for use to assess status of performance at various levels with respect to the key elements of health and health care progress” (IOM, 2015). Although indicators of patients’ health were included in that report to key elements of health behaviors, healthy communities, and preventive services, the core metrics in the report emphasized indicators of adult health. The series of papers, “Vital Signs for Pediatric Health,” describes four metrics to assess the pediatric life course, each measuring how well the health care system is building the physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional health of the pediatric population, thereby laying the foundation for the long health and well-being. The metrics—infant mortality, school readiness, chronic absenteeism, and high school graduation—were selected to focus on four different developmental stages of growth. A standardized set of core metrics to assess pediatric health could provide data to support health systems in identifying important areas for attention among their pediatric population and enable them to respond in a timely way. This rapid response is especially important in pediatric health systems in children undergo rapid development within a short time span.

This paper discusses one of these four measures—chronic absenteeism in middle school—as a developmental target for middle childhood. Middle school may include grades 5 to 9 or a subset of these grades; typically, this includes children who are approximately 10-15 years old. While chronic absenteeism—typically defined as missing 10%

or more of scheduled school days—has generally only been a measure from the time children enter formal schooling in pre-kindergarten through grade 12, measuring chronic absenteeism in middle childhood provides critical information about health and well-being between two key developmental stages captured by other vital signs: early childhood, captured by school readiness, and adolescence, captured by high school graduation.

Health and educational success are intertwined, as more education has been linked to better health outcomes across the life course (Blanch, 2017; Celis and Sørensen, 2006). Therefore, participation in education is crucial for both developmental and educational progress. Research has documented associations of chronic absenteeism with both acute (e.g., influenza infection, bacterial and chronic (e.g., asthma, type 1 diabetes mellitus) physical health conditions, as well as with mental health disorders and substance use (Johnson et al., 2019). Research has also linked chronic absenteeism to poorer educational performance and attainment (Joffe et al., 2019). Chronic absenteeism is strongly inversely associated with on-time high school graduation (IEHC, 2021). For more information on the importance of high school graduation, refer to “Vital Signs for Pediatric Health: High School Graduation” (Prepared et al., 2023).

Given the links between educational attainment and health, measuring middle school absenteeism in middle school may provide a window into physical and mental health in middle childhood and early adolescence, socio-emotional functioning, readiness to learn, family role and resilience, and potential barriers to current and long-term health and well-being (WHO, 2016). School-level chronic

## PEDIATRICS®

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

[www.pediatrics.org](http://www.pediatrics.org)

### ARTICLES

State Multisectoral Exposure and Health in Young Adults

A. Patel et al.

Early Physical Abuse and Adult Outcomes: A Systematic Review

Early Physical Abuse and Adult Outcomes: A Systematic Review

Symptoms and Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in Children

R. J. Cook et al.

Use of Mobile Health Engagement With ADHD: A Systematic Review

Use of Mobile Health Engagement With ADHD: A Systematic Review

Screening for Pediatric Drug-Related Disorders: A Systematic Review

Screening for Pediatric Drug-Related Disorders: A Systematic Review

Prevalence of Asthma in Adolescents: A Systematic Review

Prevalence of Asthma in Adolescents: A Systematic Review

Use of Social Media in the Care of Infants With ADHD

Use of Social Media in the Care of Infants With ADHD

Endocrine Disruptors for ADHD: A Systematic Review

Endocrine Disruptors for ADHD: A Systematic Review

Screening for Pediatric Drug-Related Disorders: A Systematic Review

Screening for Pediatric Drug-Related Disorders: A Systematic Review

Use of Social Media in the Care of Infants With ADHD

Use of Social Media in the Care of Infants With ADHD

Endocrine Disruptors for ADHD: A Systematic Review

Endocrine Disruptors for ADHD: A Systematic Review

Screening for Pediatric Drug-Related Disorders: A Systematic Review

Screening for Pediatric Drug-Related Disorders: A Systematic Review

Use of Social Media in the Care of Infants With ADHD

Use of Social Media in the Care of Infants With ADHD

Endocrine Disruptors for ADHD: A Systematic Review

Endocrine Disruptors for ADHD: A Systematic Review

Screening for Pediatric Drug-Related Disorders: A Systematic Review

Screening for Pediatric Drug-Related Disorders: A Systematic Review

Use of Social Media in the Care of Infants With ADHD

Use of Social Media in the Care of Infants With ADHD

Endocrine Disruptors for ADHD: A Systematic Review

Endocrine Disruptors for ADHD: A Systematic Review

### PEDIATRICS PERSPECTIVES

Barriers of Migrant Children on US Healthcare System

C. Cheng et al.

COVID-19 and Pediatric Population Models: A Systematic Review

COVID-19 and Pediatric Population Models: A Systematic Review

Symptoms and Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in Children

Symptoms and Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in Children

Use of Mobile Health Engagement With ADHD: A Systematic Review

Use of Mobile Health Engagement With ADHD: A Systematic Review

Screening for Pediatric Drug-Related Disorders: A Systematic Review

Screening for Pediatric Drug-Related Disorders: A Systematic Review

Prevalence of Asthma in Adolescents: A Systematic Review

Prevalence of Asthma in Adolescents: A Systematic Review

Use of Social Media in the Care of Infants With ADHD

Use of Social Media in the Care of Infants With ADHD

Endocrine Disruptors for ADHD: A Systematic Review

Endocrine Disruptors for ADHD: A Systematic Review

Screening for Pediatric Drug-Related Disorders: A Systematic Review

Screening for Pediatric Drug-Related Disorders: A Systematic Review

Use of Social Media in the Care of Infants With ADHD

Use of Social Media in the Care of Infants With ADHD

Endocrine Disruptors for ADHD: A Systematic Review

Endocrine Disruptors for ADHD: A Systematic Review

Screening for Pediatric Drug-Related Disorders: A Systematic Review

Screening for Pediatric Drug-Related Disorders: A Systematic Review

Use of Social Media in the Care of Infants With ADHD

Use of Social Media in the Care of Infants With ADHD

Endocrine Disruptors for ADHD: A Systematic Review

Endocrine Disruptors for ADHD: A Systematic Review

Screening for Pediatric Drug-Related Disorders: A Systematic Review

Screening for Pediatric Drug-Related Disorders: A Systematic Review

Use of Social Media in the Care of Infants With ADHD

Use of Social Media in the Care of Infants With ADHD

Endocrine Disruptors for ADHD: A Systematic Review

Endocrine Disruptors for ADHD: A Systematic Review

# Disproportionate Impact

- African American, Hispanic, American Indian, and Pacific Islander
- Students in poverty
- Students with disabilities
- LGBTQ+
- Students with chronic health conditions



# Discussion

**What are 3-4 ideas you would share with young patients and families regarding the importance of regular school attendance and the impacts of absenteeism?**



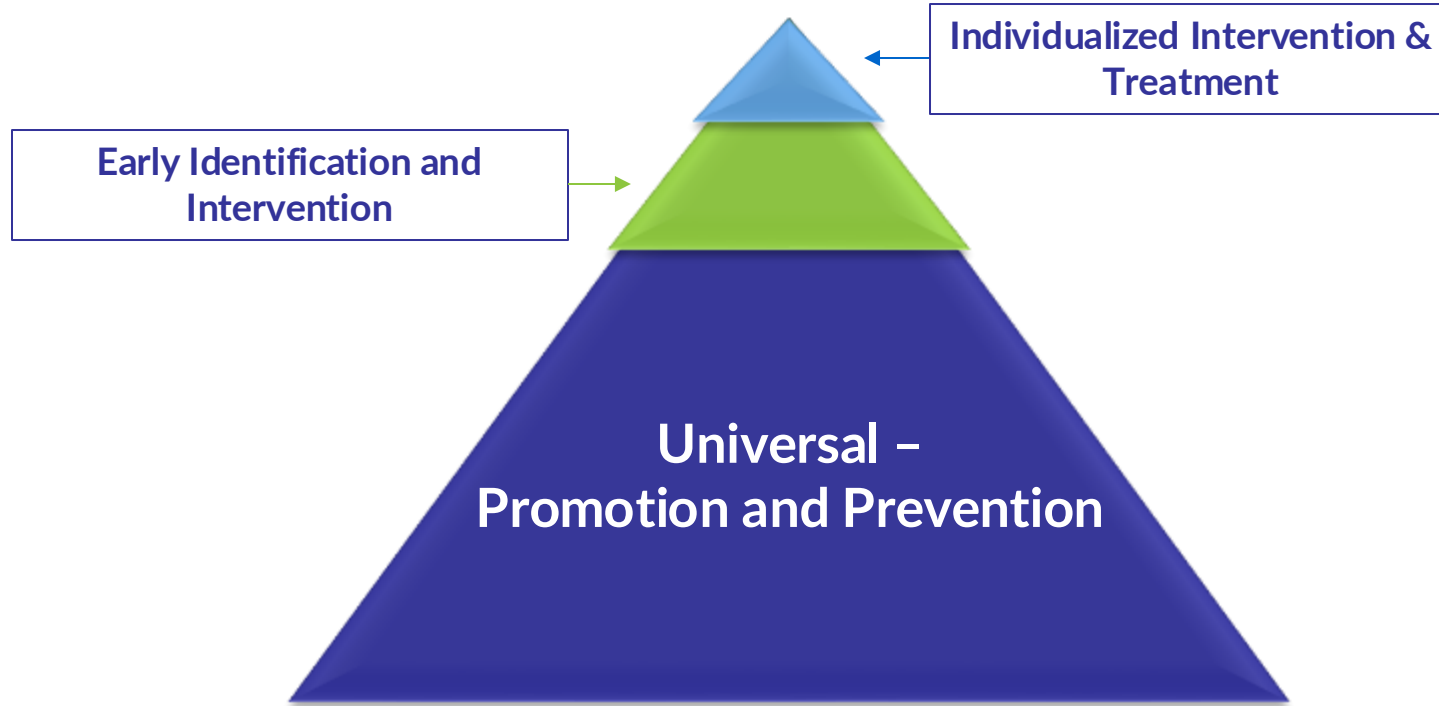
# What Can Health Care Providers Do?



- In your setting?
- In collaborating with schools?



# In Your Setting



# Universal



<b>Ask</b>	about school attendance & engagement!
<b>Promote</b>	school attendance (ex. posters in waiting rooms)
<b>Identify and Refer</b>	for basic needs, mental health, impacts of trauma
<b>Promote</b>	sleep and brain health
<b>Provide</b>	guidance to parents on when to keep kids home from school (and when not)
<b>Avoid</b>	contributing to absences; encourage appointments outside school hours

# Early Identification & Intervention



- Discuss upfront expectations around condition re: school absences
- Inquire if families of Children & Youth with Special Healthcare (CYSHN) and youth with chronic health conditions have school plans (health and educational)
- Recognize signs of school avoidance early and refer families
- Encourage youth to return to school following appointments
- Infectious Disease - *“AAP: Managing Infectious Disease in Child Care and Schools: A Quick Reference Guide”*, and the *“24-27 Red Book”*
- Identify psychosocial risk factors and health factors and refer
- Identify mental health challenges and refer

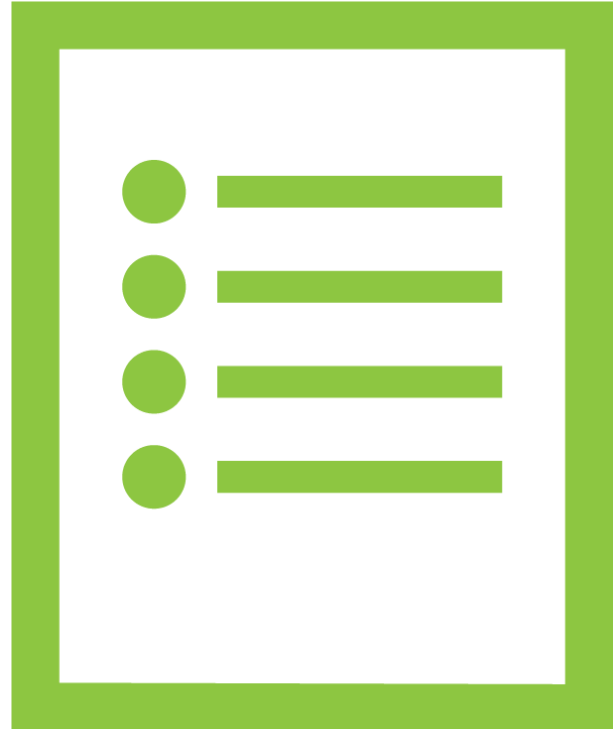
# Individualized Intervention & Treatment



- Encourage the caregivers to discuss needs and strengths, and treatment plan with the school nurse
- Help complete school health plans
- Provide information to the school so that intensive case management and services can be enacted
- Home or hospital educational services
- Communicate and collaborate with school professionals and community partners
- Ensure hospital discharge team includes school staff

# Medical Excuse Notes

- Must students obtain a note to excuse an absence?
- What is a 30-day excuse note?
- What are some best practices?



# Population Based



**Advocate**

**Improve  
Access**

**Be a  
Medical  
Advisor**

# Discussion



1. What else do you do to support school attendance at any of the tiers?
2. What is one strategy we discussed which you could reasonably incorporate into your practice?

# When a Disability is Suspected

## 115.777 Special Education Referrals

- “A physician, nurse, psychologist, social worker or administrator of a social agency who reasonably believes that a child brought to them for services has a disability shall refer the child to the local educational agency.”



School or District



# When a Disability is Suspected: Do and Don't

## DO

- ✓ Know you are making a referral for an evaluation to be completed

## DO NOT

- ✗ “Prescribe” an IEP

[The Role of Medical and Clinical Information in Special Education Evaluation and IEP Development](#)

# Educational vs. Medical

**Medical  
Diagnosis**



**Special Education  
Eligibility**

# “Adversely affecting educational performance...”



**Educational performance may include:**

Cognitive performance, including academic and pre-academic skills.

- Communication skills.
- Emotional/Social skills.
- Sensory processing and motor planning skills.
- Adaptive skills, including self-help skills and activities of daily living.

# How 504 Plans Help



If the student is “eligible” then an accommodation plan is written to eliminate barriers to accessing public school programs and extra curricular activities for which they’d be eligible if they did not have such a disability.

# Health Plans & 504 Plans

A Health Plan is not the same as a 504 Plan



# Collaborating with Schools



# Role of the School Nurse



- Manage students' physical health needs, both chronic and acute
- Often first contact regarding mental health issues
- Shares health-related factors impacting attendance
- Educates parents about managing chronic illnesses or immunizations
- Identifies and addresses physical symptoms of stress or injuries resulting from bullying

# Clarifying Orders



**Doc, could you please clarify your instructions regarding medication that I must administer at school?**



# Role of School Social Worker

- Home school community liaison
- Referrals for services and basic needs
- Support for mental health, parenting students, substance use, homelessness, criminal involvement, students in out-of-home care, family violence and neglect
- IEP team member
- Attendance point person
- Close partner of school nurse



# Collaboration



- Center student and family voice
- Encourage releases to share information
- Formulate a student-specific plan

# Collaboration is Key



## Shared Understanding, Shared Vision, Shared Responsibility

- **Prioritize Collaboration:** meet regularly with other systems
- **Proactive Planning:** talk about approaches, goals, and best practices
- **Regular Consultation:** learn from others in community, the state, and country



# Pause and Reflect

- What was new information?
- What resonates with your thinking?
- What is one step you can take towards improvement in your work?
- Are there any strategies that have worked for your community that were not shared today?



# Resources

## Help For Your Family

- Everyday Tools for Families
- Getting Started in Seeking Support
- What to Know About Therapy
- Interactive Websites for Young People



<https://children.wi.gov/Pages/Resources/Help.aspx>

# Resources

- [School Attendance Resources, Articles, Links - APA](#)
- [Students with Special Dietary Needs](#)
- [PHYSICIAN'S STATEMENT –  
HOMEBOUND INSTRUCTION](#)

# References

Allison, M. A., and Attisha, E. AAP Council on School Health. 2019. "The Link Between School Attendance and Good Health." *Pediatrics*. 143(2): e20183648.  
[http://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article-pdf/143/2/e20183648/1076401/peds\\_20183648.pdf](http://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article-pdf/143/2/e20183648/1076401/peds_20183648.pdf).

Dooley, D. , Schumacher H., DeAngelo J., de la Torre D., Adams J., Tschudy M., and Masters, A. 2018 "Making School Attendance a Vital Sign: A Cross-sector collaboration." *Pediatrics*. 142(735). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.142.1MA8.735>

Johnson, S. B., Edwards A., Cheng T., Kellehr K. J., Kaminski, J., and Fox, E.G. 2023. "Vital Signs for Pediatric Health: Chronic Absenteeism." *NAM Perspectives*. Discussion Paper, National Academy of Medicine, Washington, DC. <https://doi.org/10.31478/202306c>.

# Contacts

## Linda Hall

Director, Office of Children's  
Mental Health  
(608) 228-3895  
[linda.hall@wi.gov](mailto:linda.hall@wi.gov)



## Julie Incitti

School Social Work Consultant  
Department of Public Instruction  
608-266-0963  
[julie.incitti@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:julie.incitti@dpi.wi.gov)

## Louise Wilson

School Nurse Consultant  
Department of Public Instruction  
608-266-8857  
[louise.wilson@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:louise.wilson@dpi.wi.gov)

