



HEALTHY STEPS

TOWARD STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Research-based recommendations for policy and practice

MAY 2011

the **James Irvine** foundation

 The
California
Endowment

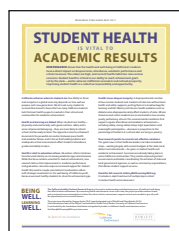
THE WILLIAM AND FLORA
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BEING WELL. LEARNING WELL.

The **California Healthy Students Research Project** is devoted to understanding and addressing issues of health and well-being that affect student achievement. By researching health and education issues in the state, the project provides evidence-based policy and practice recommendations to foster the school culture, environment, supports and services needed to give all youth the opportunity to be successful learners.

The project was directed by Gregory Austin, Ph.D. (gaustin@wested.org) of WestEd and Claire Brindis, Dr. P.H. (claire.brindis@ucsf.edu) of the Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies, University of California San Francisco. It was funded by The James Irvine Foundation, The California Endowment and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and guided by leaders in California's health and education sectors.

Find all reports from the California Healthy Students Research Project at BeingWellLearningWell.org.



Overview:

Student Health Is Vital to Academic Results

This four-page overview introduces the issue and presents high-level recommendations grounded in research.



Research briefs:

1. *The Relationship of Academic Achievement and School Well-being*
2. *The Achievement Gap and School Well-being*
3. *Addressing Root Causes of the Achievement Gap for Latino Youth*
4. *Bullying and Violence as Barriers to Academic Achievement*
5. *Youth Violence, Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms and Learning*
6. *Personalization and Caring Relationships with Adults in Urban High Schools: Is There a Relationship with Academic Achievement?*
7. *Supporting Student Health and Academic Achievement through Innovative Program and Funding Models*



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FOREWORD

For the past decade, California has understood and acted upon the need to dramatically increase student achievement. Government officials, educators, philanthropic institutions and others have appropriately responded to lagging test scores and disturbing dropout rates by acting to increase the rigor and relevance of academics.

Despite measured gains, student achievement remains unacceptably low—and unequal to the challenge of ensuring California’s place in a prosperous future. New research commissioned by The California Endowment and The James Irvine Foundation with additional support from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation confirms what some in the health and education sectors have long suspected: Safe schools, physical activity, access to physical and mental healthcare, nutritious food, caring relationships and meaningful opportunities to participate are essential to students’ academic performance. Too many California students go without these healthy basics.

Researchers at WestEd and the Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies, University of California San Francisco embarked on the California Healthy Students Research Project. What they uncovered documents the health, wellness and school environment issues that today affect student academic success. The research also illustrates the disproportionate effect of these issues on low-income students and students of color.

We offer this synthesis of findings, as well as evidence-based recommendations, to California education and health policymakers, service providers, community leaders and all who share our determination to expand opportunity, improve student achievement and build healthy communities.

The time is right to give all students a healthy chance to achieve. Our young people deserve the opportunity to reach their potential, and California needs their contributions to our economy and communities.



Robert K. Ross, M.D.
President and Chief Executive Officer
The California Endowment



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NEW RESEARCH shows that the health and well-being of California's students have a direct impact on dropout rates, attendance, academic performance and school revenues. The stakes are high and current health indicators raise serious concerns. Student health is critical to our ability to reach achievement goals set by the state—and to advance California's economic and cultural prosperity. We need to couple commitment to education reform with strategic investments in the well-being of our young people, because we need healthy students to close the achievement gap.

This report reviews research documenting the critical link between student health and well-being—both physical and socio-emotional—and academic success for California students. It also outlines policy actions that can put the research into practice. A four-page overview of research results and policy recommendations is also available. Seven research briefs, undertaken as part of this project, demonstrate a clear nexus between health and well-being and academic success.

The recommended strategies presented in this paper are intended to serve as a catalyst for policy discussions.

The recommended strategies presented in this paper are intended to serve as a catalyst for policy discussions. They range from strengthening direct supports for student health and well-being to improving school environments to strengthening state and local systems that support students' academic success. Recommendations give special attention to reducing disparities low-income students and students of color experience.

Implementing some recommendations will require greater coordination between various entities, including cities, counties, schools and nonprofit organizations. Some recommendations can be implemented at a relatively moderate cost and in a short time frame; some are long-term and carry more significant costs. Some recommendations are primarily focused at the local level and some call for state action. Overall, evidence suggests these strategies would result in improved student physical and emotional health and safety and increased student connectedness and engagement in school—all of which positively impact academic performance.

Following are key data points and a summary of resulting policy and practice recommendations.

Children who are physically active and fit perform better in the classroom. Yet only 30 percent of children and 15 percent of teens get the recommended amount of physical activity per day. This situation contributes to the doubling of childhood obesity in the last two decades.

Well-nourished students find it easier to concentrate in class. While 3.2 million students—half of all public school-age children in California—are eligible for free/reduced-price lunch, only 28 percent of students participate in the program.

Students are more likely to attend school and focus when they feel safe. Yet 37 percent of California secondary students report harassment or bullying at school in the past 12 months. Fewer than 60 percent of students feel safe at school. Bullying can account for a 1.5 letter grade decrease during middle school.

Students who experience caring and connection at school score better on tests and are less likely to drop out or engage in risky behavior. Yet among 9th-graders, just 31 percent report having high levels of caring relationships with adults on school campuses, 47 percent feel adults have high expectations of them and only 12 percent feel they have meaningful opportunities to participate in school.

When they're emotionally healthy, students are less likely to have behavior and development issues. In one city, students given access to school-based mental health centers showed a 30 percent decrease in absences and failures, and a 95 percent decrease in disciplinary referrals.

When they're physically healthy, students attend more and perform better. Diabetes, tooth decay and asthma are prevalent among California students. Two to 18 school days a year are missed by students with asthma, a condition also correlated with lower test scores and poorer academic performance.

All students deserve a healthy chance to achieve. But wellness issues widen serious achievement gaps. The number of African American and Latino 7th- and 9th-grade students testing proficient in math and language arts is about 20 percent below the number of white students testing proficient in those subjects. This achievement gap is paralleled by noteworthy gaps students of color experience in school safety, connection to and engagement in school, and basic supports for health and wellness.

RECOMMENDATIONS *at a glance*

Research findings support the following recommendations in policy and practice. Detail on each recommendation begins on page 12.

Support all students

1. Offer healthy lifestyle choices.
2. Put health and support services within reach.

Support positive school environments

3. Name and meet the basics for good environments.
4. Prepare educators to participate.
5. Engage students and families as active participants.

Support effective state and local systems

6. Make effective practice common practice.
7. Inform decisions with good data.
8. Coordinate state and local resources.

INTRODUCTION

For the past decade, California has understood and acted upon the need to dramatically increase student achievement. In recent years, the state has placed a strong focus on the achievement gap. State policymakers have adopted a series of reforms including statewide standards and assessment, aligned professional development, and supported efforts to change the basic structure of teaching and learning by reducing class size and creating smaller high schools and learning communities. At the same time, many of the nation's largest philanthropic organizations including The James Irvine Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Stuart Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have funded research and other efforts to identify obstacles to success and chart roadmaps for the state. These efforts include but are not limited to the Superintendent's P-16 Council work and reports, and the McKinsey analysis of student and teacher data.

While there is evidence that these public and private efforts have resulted in increased student performance¹ and additional approaches to education reform, research also suggests that reaching student performance goals in California will require meeting the physical and social emotional needs and challenges of the great diversity of students in our public schools. Some communities, schools and districts are making progress in these areas, but their gains alone won't position California for a successful future. In many cases, meeting student wellness needs requires changes in culture and habit as well as improved relationships and collaboration between schools and other governmental and community organizations, which may be difficult. Research shows that physical, cultural and emotional health and the school environment in which teaching and learning are expected to occur dramatically impact a student's ability to succeed. This is true for all students, and more acutely so for low-income students. When a student misses school days or is distracted due to physical or emotional health-related issues such as asthma, hunger, insufficient exercise, bullying, violence, discrimination or boredom and disconnection from school, that student's likelihood of academic success drops dramatically.

Research shows that physical, cultural and emotional health and the school environment in which teaching and learning is expected to occur dramatically impact a student's ability to succeed.

To catalyze the discussion on this issue, The California Endowment, The James Irvine Foundation and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation have funded the California Healthy Students Research Project, an effort intended to research the link between health and academic success and provide evidence-based policy and practice recommendations to state and local policymakers, bringing

¹ John Mockler and Associates, Inc. (2010). *Who says we're not getting our money's worth?* [PowerPoint presentation].

student health and well-being into the education reform discussion. At a time when education budgets are being slashed and teachers and administrators are working harder and under more pressure than ever to achieve a specific set of results, it is imperative that the state government, local school districts, and other public and private organizations and community stakeholders: (1) think comprehensively about the supports and services all students, particularly low-income students and students of color, need to be successful; (2) work across traditional jurisdictions (federal, state and local governments, schools and community organizations) to determine how, when and where to effectively and efficiently provide the educational/learning supports and services students need; and (3) pay closer attention to how schools and communities can create more caring, culturally relevant and engaging environments for all students.

Just as schools and communities need to think comprehensively and holistically about their students, the policy recommendations presented in this report resulted from collaborations across education and children's advocacy groups in order to more fully address student health and well-being and improve academic success. These recommendations are both short-term and long-term, and they range in cost from moderate to significant. Many of the recommendations do not involve adding new programs or services, but require more thoughtful consideration of the types of services and education supports students receive and how various stakeholders can work collaboratively to more effectively and efficiently deliver both. Interested readers may also look to policy agendas and initiatives being undertaken by Children Now², California School Health Centers Association³, California School Boards Association⁴, Coalition of Pupil Support Services⁵, SSPI Transition Team, California Department of Education⁶, and others⁷.

This report is not intended to provide a comprehensive set of policy recommendations for the state. Rather, it attempts to be a primer and catalyst for policy discussion at the state and local levels. Following a brief project history, the report presents a series of policy and practice recommendations in detail.

² Children Now. (December 2010). *California report card 2011: Setting the agenda for children*. Retrieved from http://www.childrennow.org/uploads/documents/reportcard_2011.pdf

³ California School Health Centers Association. (January 12, 2011). *Recommendations on school health and support services: California working families policy summit*. Retrieved from <http://www.ccrwf.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/cshc-recommendations-wfsummit2011-final.pdf>

⁴ California School Boards Association. (2010). *2011-12 policy platform*. Retrieved from <http://www.csba.org/en/AboutCSBA/HowWeAreGoverned/DelegateAssembly/~media/80037621E75848019968B918FE531D5F.ashx>

⁵ Pupil Services Coalition. (March 2011). *Recommendations for improving pupil support services*. [unpublished manuscript, received from Nancy Spradling, formerly of California School Nurses Organization].

⁶ Conversation with Erin Gabel, California Department of Education. (Winter 2010).

⁷ See California Department of Public Health. (2010). *California obesity prevention plan: A vision for tomorrow, strategic actions for today*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/COPP/Documents/COPP-ObesityPreventionPlan-2010.pdf> and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2009). *Charting nursing's future archives*. Retrieved from <http://www.rwjf.org/pr/product.jsp?id=38074>

PROJECT HISTORY AND PARTICIPANTS

The James Irvine Foundation, The California Endowment and The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation funded two research organizations to produce a series of briefs on well-being issues impacting students' ability to achieve academic success. Greg Austin, Director of the WestEd Health and Human Development Program, was asked to produce and/or coordinate papers on school climate and many of the social/emotional issues facing young people. Mary Kreger, Senior Researcher at the Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies at the University of California San Francisco, and Claire Brindis, Dr. P.H., Director of the Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies, were asked to discuss the physical health aspects of students' well-being and to describe effective practices at the local level.

Research and policy briefs

The researchers' work led to publication of a framing paper, titled *The Critical Connection Between Student Health and Academic Achievement: How Schools and Policymakers Can Achieve a Positive Impact*. The framing paper was used to generate discussion among education and health leaders, and to fuel development of policy and program recommendations. Its content has evolved and is now largely reflected in this document.

In addition, seven research and policy briefs were developed. As noted above, these briefs were not intended to tell the entire story of the connection between student health and academic success, but rather were meant as a catalyst for state and local policy discussions. The briefs are as follows:

- **Brief 1: The Relationship of Academic Achievement and School Well-being.** Data suggest that efforts to turn around low-performing schools and increase student achievement will be improved if they include learning supports that make these schools more safe, caring, challenging, participatory and engaging for the youth they serve. Authors: Thomas Hanson, Gregory Austin and Cindy Zheng; WestEd.
- **Brief 2: The Achievement Gap and School Well-being.** Both academic performance and school well-being consistently and significantly vary in relation to the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic compositions of California schools, suggesting that efforts to close the achievement gap include learning supports that foster caring adult relationships, high expectations, meaningful participation, safety and connectedness in schools. Authors: Thomas Hanson, Gregory Austin and Cindy Zheng; WestEd.

- **Brief 3: Addressing Root Causes of the Achievement Gap for Latino Youth in California.** Poor educational outcomes are symptomatic of a pronounced lack of well-being among many Latino youth. Closing the achievement gap will involve engaging Latino communities and addressing the emotional, physical and psychological needs of Latino students. Author: Patricia Gándara; University of California Los Angeles.
- **Brief 4: Bullying and Violence as Barriers to Academic Achievement.** Evidence indicates that being bullied or witnessing bullying at school creates problems for students, compromising their academic achievement, and that efforts to address bullying and reduce harassment can improve the social climate of schools. Author: Jaana Juvonen; University of California Los Angeles.
- **Brief 5: Youth Violence, Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms and Learning.** Exposure to violence causes stress and changes in cognitive processing that can have a negative impact on mental health, personal relationships and academic achievement. In violent places, posttraumatic stress disorder is more prevalent. Students of color have the highest rates of exposure to violence. Schools can address the problem with interventions that take a bio-psycho-social approach; that include family, school community strategies and cross-disciplinary partnerships; and that raise awareness of the link between violence exposure, student health and academic success. Author: Victor G. Carrion, M.D.; Stanford University, Stanford Early Life Stress Research Program.
- **Brief 6: Personalization and Caring Relationships with Adults in Urban High Schools: Is There a Relationship with Academic Achievement?** Students reporting higher levels of personalization, characterized by positive and caring relationships with adults, have significantly higher weighted grade point averages and English test scores, highlighting a need to create the school climate that fosters caring relationships and mentoring naturally over time. Authors: Larry McClure, Susan Yonezawa and Makeba Jones; University of California San Diego.
- **Brief 7: Supporting Student Health and Academic Achievement through Innovative Program and Funding Models.** Starting from the premise that students have the best chance to succeed academically when they are physically, mentally and socially healthy, this brief spotlights efforts that successfully fund and implement coordinated learning support services and programs for California's children and youth. Authors: Mary Kreger, Dr. P.H., MPH, Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies, University of California San Francisco; Sandi Goldstein, MPH and Robin Kirkpatrick, LCSW, MPH, California Adolescent Health Collaborative; and Claire Brindis Dr. P.H., Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies, University of California San Francisco.

In addition to the briefs commissioned for this project, recommendations in this report draw upon other research in the field⁸ and the following research commissioned by The California Endowment around physical education, physical activity and their link to health and educational success:

“Physical Education Matters,” “Active Living Research: Physical Education, Physical Activity, and Academic Performance,” and “Failing Fitness.” This research shows that children who are physically active and fit tend to perform better in the classroom and that even when the addition of daily physical education takes time away from existing classroom instruction, it does not adversely impact academic performance. Over the past two decades, childhood obesity has increased at least twofold in the general population. This crisis is worse for low-income and children of color, as they often do not have access to safe places for physical activity in their neighborhoods.

To provide support and advice for the California Healthy Students Research Project, an advisory committee was created consisting of representatives of health and education organizations at the state and local levels (see page 22). Advisory committee members provided feedback on each of the published briefs as well as guidance and input on this summary paper and the recommendations it contains. The recommendations arise from research as well as expertise in policy and practice from a variety of fields and sectors. In this way, they represent the best thinking and guidance for state/local policymakers as they seek solutions to increase academic achievement for all students in California.

⁸ Nancy Erbstein, Ph.D., University of California Davis School of Education, CRESS/Center for Community School Partnerships and Elizabeth Miller, M.D., Ph.D., University of California Davis School of Medicine Department of Pediatrics. *Partnering with Communities to Promote Student Success: A Review of the Research*. A Collaboration between the California Department of Education and the University of California organized by the UC Davis School of Education Center for Applied Policy in Education. (April 2008); Joshua Breslau. *The Connection Between Health and High School Dropout*. California Dropout Research Project, Policy Brief 17. UC Santa Barbara, Gevirtz Graduate School of Education. (March 2010); Lisa Warhuus, Ph.D. and Leslie Poyner, Ph.D. *School Climate for Learning*. Alameda County School Health Services Coalition; John Shindler, Albert Jones, A Dee Williams, Clint Taylor, and Hermenia Cadenas. *Exploring the School Climate—Student Achievement Connection: And Making Sense of Why the First Precedes the Second*. Alliance for the Study of School Climate, California State University Los Angeles. *Physical Education Research for Kids (PERK)*, California Task Force on Youth and Workplace Wellness.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Following are three broad approaches and eight initial recommendations for adding health and well-being to the formula for student achievement, equity and prosperity in California. Recommendations are numbered for ease of reference; numbers do not imply sequence or priority.

Support all students

Research shows that students have the best chance to succeed when they are healthy. “Health” in this context includes a nutritious diet, physical activity, emotional well-being, safety and a sense of security, the absence of chronic conditions such as asthma or diabetes, and access to physical/mental health services.

Research shows that students who eat breakfast regularly at school scored 50 percent higher on standardized math tests and had nearly half the absentee rates compared with students who ate school breakfast rarely⁹. Also, students given access to school-based mental health services showed a 30 percent decrease in absences and failures, and a 95 percent decrease in disciplinary referrals¹⁰. The Institute for Health Policy Studies shows that two to 18 school days a year are missed by students with asthma and that asthma is correlated with lower test scores and poorer academic performance. Students who are exposed to violence show poor academic performance. Many of these students experience posttraumatic stress disorders, feel hopeless and depressed, and have reduced motivation and persistence to learn (see Brief 5). Disproportionate numbers of African American and Latino youth experience poor health and poor nutrition. These groups are twice as likely as their white counterparts to be overweight or to suffer chronic health problems such as diabetes (see Brief 3). They have few opportunities for physical activity. And they lack access to health, dental and vision care. All of the above contribute to a troubling achievement gap between these and other students. Additionally, fewer than half of California’s public schools meet the state-mandated physical education minute requirements, and students of color have less access to physical education (especially quality physical education) than their white peers.

Many California schools and communities struggle to meet the health needs of their students although both student well-being and academic outcomes are at stake.

⁹ Hart Research Associates and American Viewpoint. (August 2010). *Public perceptions of the impact of student health on learning and success* (p. 16). [Public opinion research on behalf of The California Endowment].

¹⁰ Ibid.

Many California schools and communities struggle to meet the health needs of their students although both student well-being and academic outcomes are at stake. Low-income communities and communities of color feel the effects most profoundly. Some school nurses focus primarily on helping students manage chronic illnesses, leaving little time to address prevention. Some communities have school-based health clinics. Some schools partner with community agencies to provide health services. Too many schools and communities are unable to provide even basic supports for student health and well-being. Urban and rural communities face unique struggles to access services. Federal, state and local funding cutbacks, including the loss of Title IV funding, which provided for violence and drug and alcohol prevention services, exacerbates this problem. The following recommendations will strengthen access to and use of needed health and wellness support services for students.

Recommendation 1: Offer Healthy Lifestyle Choices

State and local governments can improve student access to physical activity and nutrition in order to address the obesity epidemic and improve student learning by:

- Supporting and monitoring school efforts to comply with state physical education requirements
- Supporting and monitoring school efforts to comply with new federal and state laws requiring improved nutritional quality of school meals and snacks, and required access to free, fresh drinking water during meals
- Removing barriers for school and community-based gardens
- Strengthening infrastructure to better support the dissemination and adoption of effective practices and improve professional development of staff around:
 - Integrating short physical activity elements into classroom and school/community-based after-school learning settings
 - Incorporating the opportunity for moderate to vigorous physical activity into physical education curriculum during the school day, after school and in the summer
 - Engaging schools, communities and students to enroll in the new, streamlined free and reduced-price meal programs, before school, during school and in the summer
 - Supporting students to eat healthfully through nutrition education and by reducing access to unhealthy foods
 - Developing partnerships with recreation and parks entities; creating environmental education efforts to link students to community-based outdoor opportunities and to enable joint use of community/school facilities
 - Identifying specific practices that work in rural communities

Recommendation 2: Put Health and Support Services within Reach

The state should assist education, local governments and health providers in their efforts to better respond to the needs of students by making access to support services easier, strengthening the continuum of care and learning supports for students, and supporting school-based healthcare services through such strategies as:

- Developing eligibility and enrollment standards across all income-based children's programs and facilitating more effective interagency cooperation
- Making public reimbursement and funding for services universal (i.e., if you are on medical or food stamps you are automatically eligible for free and reduced lunch) and easy for families to understand through improved interagency cooperation
- Supporting local efforts to make schools access points for support services that offer a continuum of integrated learning supports, including dental and vision care, from prevention to intervention and chronic disease management (models include full-service community schools/Healthy Start, school-based health clinics, school-based mental health services, and coordinated school health)
- Reviewing and modifying the state's joint use of facilities program to ensure eligible uses meet school/community needs, especially in low-income communities of color; (e.g., allowing school-based health centers to be eligible for funding and supporting school/community facilities in increasing access to physical activity, especially in low-income communities)
- Exploring the "braiding" of federal and state funding to support integrated social and health services at school sites, including allowing state Mental Health Act funds to support school-based health and well-being services
- Promoting policies that maximize the eligibility of school health centers in incentives payments for the adoption of electronic health records; include school-based providers in the Health Information Exchange and as children's "medical homes"
- Enacting policy changes within the Department of Health Care Services to maximize the revenue that local education agencies can generate from the LEA Medi-Cal direct billing program and administrative activities to support school-based healthcare service and school-based nursing services
- Protect programs and funding streams that enable children and youth to access healthcare and school-based nurses (e.g., Healthy Families, Child Health and Disability Prevention Program and Community Challenge Grants)

Support positive school environments

While high standards, appropriate assessments, rigorous curriculum and quality instruction are critical to student success, research also demonstrates the critical importance of positive school environments. A positive school environment provides safe, well-maintained and well-equipped physical spaces, as well as a climate where students, teachers and parents feel physically and emotionally safe, supported and engaged.

Academic achievement is highly correlated with students' sense of connection and a caring school climate. Research shows that students who experience more caring relationships, high expectations and opportunities to actively participate in school life feel more connected to school, do better on academic performance tests, attend school more regularly, are more likely to graduate and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors. Students who report a more personalized school experience have higher weighted grade point averages (see Brief 6).

Academic achievement is highly correlated with students' sense of connection and a caring school climate.

Based on statewide California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) data, students in California schools do not experience high levels of connectivity and engagement: Among 9th-graders, only 31 percent are classified as having high levels of caring relationships with adults on school campuses, 47 percent as having high (academic) expectations, and 12 percent as having meaningful opportunities to participate. These percentages are lower for students of color. Indeed, the achievement gap between many students of color and their white counterparts is paralleled by noteworthy gaps students of color experience in school safety, connection to and engagement in school, and the supports available to them. Students in lower performing schools and students of color consistently report lower levels of all of these factors on the CHKS (see Briefs 1 and 2).

Thirty-seven percent of secondary students report being harassed or bullied at school in the past 12 months (CHKS). Harassment and bullying not only have emotional impacts, but lead to absenteeism and poor academic performance.

The foundation for a positive school climate rests on the integration of academic and behavior approaches that address the student as a whole person and that understand the needs of a diverse student population. Positive school environments focus on engaging all stakeholders to support academic, social/emotional, physical, civic, creative/cultural, and vocational needs of children and to ensure the environments in which they learn have safe and supportive climates.

The dimensions of school climate that increase student connection and academic success include:

- Safety—sense of security and belonging; clean, welcoming facility; free of physical and emotional harm
- Caring interpersonal relationships—respect for diversity, supportive student-adult and student-student relationships, high expectations
- Strong teaching and learning practices—encouragement; culturally relevant approach; reflection practices; use of audio, visual and kinesthetic teaching methods; challenging and meaningful curriculum; experiential learning methods; teaching social and civic skills; personalization; professional learning communities; cooperative learning
- Inclusive institutional environment—norms that support staff, student, community and family participation, inclusion and collaboration; a focus on physical health and emotional well-being as key to academic success; representation of student voice; consistent expectations for all students; asset-based approach to behavior issues; cultural competency
- Appropriate learning supports—a system of developmentally, culturally appropriate learning supports (e.g., tutoring, mental health and counseling services, healthy foods, physical activity, etc.) that can help address the physical and socio-emotional needs of each child, made possible through school, family and community partnerships

Although schools on their own cannot address many of the broader socio-economic factors that affect student academic success, they can influence school climate and educational supports, and research shows that these have an impact on academic performance.

Recommendation 3: Name and Meet the Basics for Good Environments

The state should define school climate in statute¹¹ and support strategies that advance emotional and physical health as well as safety in school environments, including safe passage to school.

These strategies should:

- Engage parents, teachers, students, administrators and community members to review school climate and student health data (e.g., CHKS, Fitness Gram) and develop plans to improve climate and student health (see recommendation 7 pertaining to data gathering and use)

¹¹ National School Climate Center. (2011). *School climate*. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate>

- Incorporate climate improvements into school site plans¹² developed by site councils or corrective action plans for program improvement schools
- Encourage personalizing the student experience
- Promote learning standards for social and emotional learning and explore K-12 curriculum around these standards¹³
- Encourage the reauthorization of the Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act to support school-based healthcare, school climate, learning supports, physical education and physical activity opportunities during the school day and after school

Recommendation 4: Prepare Educators to Participate

Administrator and teacher education programs should recognize the importance of student health and well-being and include content that covers:

- The effect of school climate on adolescent health and achievement and how to improve it
- The importance of learning supports, pupil support services, school-community partnerships and how to best engage these resources to help students facing adversity and to support their academic success
- How to create a caring school climate in practice (e.g., effective methods for building caring relationships with all students, engaging student voice and opportunities to participate, employing experiential learning methods, using differentiated instruction and recognizing cultural differences)
- The link between physical activity, physical education, nutrition and academic success

Recommendation 5: Engage Students and Families as Active Participants

The state should continue to build infrastructure to help school districts, schools and local governments to employ effective practices that promote student and family engagement and provide a continuum of supports for students including, but not limited to:

- Early warning systems involving students, families and teachers in identifying health and wellness problems that affect student achievement; preparing systems to get students help early and in a comprehensive, culturally appropriate fashion

¹² UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools. (July 2006). *Promoting a systemic focus on learning supports to address barriers to learning and teaching*. Retrieved from <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/PromotingaSystematicFocus.pdf>

¹³ Center for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. *State learning standards to advance social and emotional learning: The CASEL state scan of social and emotional learning standards, preschool through high school*. Retrieved from <http://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Brief-on-the-State-Scan-4-18-2011.pdf>

- Models and practices for engaging student voice and choice, such as youth organizing, peer programs, youth leadership structures and experiential teaching methods
- Models and practices for parent engagement, such as parent-teacher home visits
- Create school-based comprehensive systems of learning and health supports in partnership with families and community during the school day and after school (see related recommendations 1, 2 and 3)
- Encourage state agencies and local grantees of state programs to include student input to inform the allocation of funds, program design, policy and program evaluation

Support effective state and local systems

The state spends well over half its General Fund budget on education and health services for children and youth. The system governing how state and federal money is spent is fragmented, and government agencies are often disconnected from each other and important community-based resources. Students, young people and their families receive public services in a variety of venues supported by a myriad of funding streams, each generally with its own set of rules, regulations and oversight. While professionals working in schools or government/community agencies may be held accountable for programs in their purview, accountability for the overall health and academic success of individual students is lacking. This scenario plays out amid rising public appetite for accountability and increasing ability to measure progress and success as government money is spent. In an era of decreasing public revenues, the effectiveness and efficiency of every dollar spent and the ability to reach a desired set of results become even more important.

The system governing how state and federal money is spent is fragmented, and government agencies are often disconnected from each other and important community-based resources.

Recommendation 6: Make Effective Practice Common Practice

The state should continue to develop and coordinate infrastructure to identify and support the adoption of evidence-based practices across the health, education, juvenile justice and welfare sectors that relate to improving academic success, whole-child development and reduction in health and educational disparities. As described in Brief 7, proven practices are at work at state and local levels, effectively funding and providing coordinated services to young people and their families. Specifically, the state should:

- Build on, integrate and evaluate existing technical support efforts, such as California Department of Education's Brokers of Expertise, which uses technology to help practitioners communicate and share proven methods with one another, and the technical supports employed in Healthy Start, After School and Service Learning
- Provide additional technical support to schools in low-income communities to help these schools gain exposure to effective practices and support replication

Recommendation 7: Inform Decisions with Good Data

In addition to collecting academic data, the state should continue to support the collection of data on student health, well-being and school climate and use these data to inform policy and practice.¹⁴ Specific recommendations for improving data collection and use include:

- Better integrating data the state is currently collecting within and across departments
- Establishing a set of desired results and metrics that can be used across agencies and by which the state and local governments can measure progress on improving school climate and student health factors that affect achievement
- Establishing an annual, transparent reporting system that publicizes results; using the data to increase the efficiency, coordination and effectiveness of program and service delivery with attention paid to equity issues
- Collaboratively identifying and seeking federal and private funds and better leveraging resources across departments
- Continually refining data-collection tools and ensuring districts are prepared to employ them
- Building upon and providing continued support for the comprehensive California School Climate, Health and Learning Survey System (a central component in this system, the CHKS¹⁵, has been cited as a national model); promoting a more standardized approach to climate assessment
- Improving data collection on chronic illness and other health indicators (e.g., fitness, nutrition, absences) of students in schools

Recommendation 8: Coordinate State and Local Resources

State and local governments should improve delivery of services, collaboration, information-sharing and efficiency among and within government agencies and departments serving children. At the state level, this could be accomplished by a Children's Cabinet comprising the department heads of each child-serving entity, as well as the superintendent of public instruction. This structure could serve as a model to local communities as they seek to also coordinate services among sectors.

¹⁴ See National School Climate Center. (2011). The school climate challenge: Narrowing the gap between school climate research and school climate policy, practice guidelines and teacher education policy. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/school-climate-challenge.pdf> and Children Now. (December 2010). *California report card 2011: Setting the agenda for children*. Retrieved from http://www.childrennow.org/uploads/documents/reportcard_2011.pdf

¹⁵ Since 2003, the California Department of Education has required CHKS and CSCS surveys be administered biennially by all school districts to meet the requirements of Title IV of the No Child Left Behind Act. The resulting data is widely used at the local, county and state levels to guide health and school program improvement and for research. The federal Title IV program has now ended. Schools are no longer required to conduct these surveys, nor do the state or districts have Title IV funds to support the cost of data collection or to sustain violence prevention and drug and alcohol services. The comprehensive California School Climate, Health and Learning Survey System includes student, parent and teacher survey instruments.

CONCLUSION

California must couple its commitment to education reform with strategic investments in the well-being of youth. As this report and the accompanying research briefs demonstrate, student health—physical and emotional, including safety and a sense of belonging—is essential in order to increase academic performance. To succeed in this aim, Californians have a collective responsibility to better address the needs of the whole child. The education sector cannot do it alone.

The good news is that interest and momentum are growing among allies across the education, health, public and private sectors. By collaborating on solutions and using resources more wisely, we can treat health and well-being as critical to student success—to improve student achievement, equity and California's future. The recommendations in this report are a starting point.

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