Benefits of School-Based Health Centers

School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) place critically needed health-related services directly in schools to reduce access to barriers for children, families, and school personnel.1,2

**School-Based Health Center**
Offers primary care services through a staffed primary care provider (e.g., nurse practitioner or physician assistant)

**Comprehensive School-Based Health Center**
Offers primary care, behavioral health and other expanded services, including health education, dental, and vision services

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**The Need for School-Based Health Centers in Georgia**

- **176,000** children in Georgia do not have health care coverage
- **130,000** children, on average, in Georgia stay home sick more than 6 days a year. Chronic conditions (e.g., asthma) and other health-related challenges (e.g., dental pain) are likely causes of chronic absenteeism.
- **45%** of children 3-17 struggle to, or are not able to, access needed mental health treatment and counseling

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**The Benefits of School-Based Health Centers**

More than **100,000** children, families, and school personnel currently benefit from services at **102** SBHCs (growing from two in 2013) in Georgia.

**Health**

*Increased:*
- Access to primary, oral, and behavioral health care
- Use of mental health and substance abuse services
- Access to the flu vaccination

*Decreased:*
- Emergency room use and hospitalization for children with asthma
- Prescription drug use

**Education**

*Increased:*
- Attendance and GPAs for students utilizing mental health services

*Decreased:*
- Drop out rates and school discipline referrals
- Faculty and staff absences due to illness

**Cost Savings**

*Decreased:*
- Drop out rates and school discipline referrals
- Faculty and staff absences due to illness

**How This Looks in Georgia:**

- Turner SBHC initiated Halls to Health, a program that addresses childhood obesity and student emotional health.
- Tiger Creek SBHC offers services to the entire community, including adults.
- Albany Area Primary Health Care SBHC offers eye exams and glasses to all students within the Dougherty County School System.

**Whitefoord SBHC**

- Whitefoord SBHC reported a 50% reduction in average cost per child to Medicaid for children with SBHC access, and a 62% reduction in annual expense per Medicaid-covered child.

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Sustaining School-Based Health Centers

SBHCs can quickly become self-sustaining when start-up funds are available. Georgia has allocated $125 million of federal funding to support planning and startup of new SBHCs.

Funding for SBHCs

17 states and Washington, D.C. have an ongoing funding mechanism to support SBHCs. Philanthropic partners provide another funding opportunity for SBHCs.

Current SBHC grants in Georgia:
- **NIH Grant** to study the impact and benefits of SBHCs in suburban and rural areas of Georgia.
- **PARTNERS for Equity in Child and Adolescent Health**: allocates planning grants to communities in Georgia. 46 have been awarded since 2010.
- **The Georgia Department of Education’s Office of Whole Child Supports**: offers SBHC planning grants to expand school-based health services to rural communities.
- **Medical College of Georgia**: supports a SBHC in a middle school in Athens, GA.

Recommendations to Strengthen School-Based Health Centers

- Continue to increase state funding to Federal Qualified Health Centers to support the development and expansion of school-based health services throughout the state, especially in high-need, rural areas.
- Ensure that school-based health centers are comprehensive and facilitate access to behavioral health services.
- Ensure effective telehealth practice and outcomes, including emphasis on quality control, maintaining pandemic-related telehealth flexibilities, and provider reimbursements (e.g., insurance reimbursement for consultation and services provided via telephone, video chat, and the like).
Sources for Benefits of School-Based Health Centers

3 Georgetown University, Center for Children and Families. (2022). Analysis of the 2021 U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) Table HIC-5, Health Insurance Status and Type of Coverage by State - Children Under 19, Health Insurance Historical Tables.