

# Health Education in School Health Centers

## School Health Centers in Alameda County

School health centers (SHCs) are both health clinics and also places for students to experience positive youth development opportunities. Successful SHCs go beyond co-locating services on a school site; they have trusting and collaborative relationships with youth, families, schools, health providers, and the community.

Our network of 29 SHCs approach young people holistically, offering integrated health and wellness services that include medical, dental, behavioral health, health education, and youth development. In the SHCs, youth experience authentic relationships with health providers and develop agency over their own health and lifestyle decisions.

## Why Health Education in School Health Centers?

Healthier students are better learners, and not all students learn the same way. It takes different approaches to convey and reinforce positive health messages. Health education and promotion helps students improve their health by increasing their understanding of the health issues that impact them, their families, their school, and the community. As a field, health education and promotion focuses on the behaviors, systems, environments, and policies that affect

health on multiple levels. In our school health centers, we provide a wide array of learning experiences designed to increase student knowledge, influence attitudes and behavior, and empower students to promote healthy habits among their peers and communities.

## Our Approach

Health education and promotion encompasses clinical health education, health promotion, and school climate activities.

### Clinical Health Education

involves working with an individual student on a specific health topic, for example, asthma or nutrition. The health provider creates a plan with the student, and their family, as appropriate, to address an issue, provide education, one-on-one and group support, and follow-up.

**Health Promotion** activities are school-wide in focus and address health issues relevant for the student age group for that school community. Activities involve health campaigns, peer health education, health fairs, and classroom presentations. For example, a high school student who participated in one of the peer health educator groups decided to focus on preventing teen dating violence. She created a pocket zine that was distributed to students. It explained dating violence,



how to look for the signs, how to protect yourself, and how to be an ally if a friend is ever in need. Throughout the school year she also referred many of her peers for reproductive health services and urged them to take charge of their health.

**School Climate** is an important component of our health education approach. SHC staff participate in positive school climate activities in a variety of ways. By contributing their health lens to the collective effort to create a learning environment that supports wellness and success for students, staff, and partners. Last year, one of the high schools had been experiencing heightened racial tension after an act of violence in the community. The SHC staff collaborated with the school administration, a local youth center, and students to organize a lunchtime event of music, performance, and community-building. They brought in the Stop the Violence Street Team, a coalition of African-American and Latino men committed to promoting peace and unity in communities of color. The youth center set up a DJ booth, brought in a hip-hop dance team, and the SHC staff and the Stop the Violence Street Team spoke with students and staff about conflict resolution, managing anger and grief, and relationship-building.

## Highlights

The school health centers provided 6,836 clinical health education visits in 2013-14, constituting 12% of all visits. On average, students usually returned for one or more additional health education visits. In 2013-14, 19 of the school health centers organized more than 700 health fairs and school-wide outreach activities, reaching more than 33,000 students and the school community. These health education and health promotion activities ranged from tables set up at student orientations, to a Sexual Health Fair, to a tobacco education lunch event. Across the county, the SHCs organized 24 different peer health education and mentoring groups with an average of 10 to 15 students that met regularly throughout the year. The peer educators focused on a variety of topics such as safe partying, healthy eating, birth control methods, and stress management.

School health centers are promoting healthy habits and a positive school climate. One of the middle school health centers hosts an annual Health Fair in which all 500-plus students participate in interactive booths about nutritional wellness, water, reproductive health, and more. They recently added a Staff Wellness Corner. Staff, parents, and the adult community members participate in blood pressure screenings, massage, acupuncture, and wellness consultation. Participation of partners has steadily expanded over the years to almost 15 community based organizations. Activity stations can include an obstacle course, jumper, smoothie station, spa water bar, face painting, photo booth, graffiti art station, and a prize booth. Students, staff, and partners look forward to the Health Fair every year. They add new themes, activities, and opportunities for community building.

