

School-Based Health Centers

Excerpts from the report by [Parents Defending Education](https://defendinged.org/investigations/school-based-health-centers/) on School-Based Health Centers. (<https://defendinged.org/investigations/school-based-health-centers/>)

Executive Summary

School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) are touted by proponents as a component of the education trend du jour, “[wrap-around services](#),” which theorizes that if students’ physical and mental health needs are met then academic achievement will improve. Often housed inside of a school, SBHCs feature staff who range from certified nurses to medical doctors and psychologists.

While such programming may seem innocent at first glance, the lack of guardrails on these programs – combined with the existence of parental exclusion policies and low medical age of consent in many states – means that in practice, students can access life-altering treatments without the knowledge of family members. While the majority of SBHCs only offer basic medical care, screenings, and access to behavioral and mental health care, some centers offer students access to abortion (including emergency contraception – such as Plan B) as well as gender-affirming care.

What Is A School-Based Health Center?

According to the [Community Preventative Services Task Force](#), a CDC-administered group, School-Based Health Centers “provide primary health services to students in grades K-12 and may be offered on-site (school-based centers) or off-site (school-linked centers).” SBHCs are “often established in schools that serve predominantly low-income communities.”

A goal of SBHCs is to give students and families access to health care and end the cycle of poverty, negative health outcomes, and poor educational achievement.

SBHCs include clinicians who provide “primary care services” or “a multi-disciplinary team providing comprehensive services.” Services vary, but can include “mental health care, social services, dentistry, and health education.” Some SBHCs offer students access to “reproductive health care,” which can include emergency contraception (via the morning after pill).

A [2020 University of Arkansas report](#) casts doubt on the efficacy of SBHCs and the impact on student achievement in a paper that investigated whether “the presence of an SBHC associated with a change in school-level achievement scores for Arkansas public schools,” and “is the presence of an SBHC associated with a change in school-level achievement scores for specific types of schools or specific school populations (i.e. low-income, or majority minority schools)?”

The authors analyzed the “relationship between SBHCs and school-level achievement scores” from 24 schools from across the state, finding that school achievement scores “do not reflect consistent improvement after an SBHC opens on their campus.” The report also notes that according to available data, attendance rates did not improve after the opening of a SBHC on campus.

Overall, their findings reveal “that on average there is no statistically significant relationship between the presence of an SBHC and changes in academic achievement scores.”

A February 2023 [clinical research article](#) examining “whether a school-based health center model improved academic achievement compared to usual care” found no “evidence that our SBHC model improved academic achievement,” but did find that SBHCs benefitted “diagnosing and treating children with developmental and mental health disorders.”

Common Services Offered by School-Based Health Centers

- Behavioral Health Services
- Dental Health Services
- Emergency contraception
- Immunization
- Primary Medical Health Services
- Psychiatric Services
- Reproductive Health Care
- Telehealth Services
- Vaccinations

Questions Parents Can Ask Their School

What services are offered through the school-based health center?

What is the parental notification policy for students to receive services at the school-based health center?

How is parental consent for minors obtained before students access any type of services at these centers?

Does the district/school have a clear process posted publicly regarding prior parental consent to access services? If so, where can parents access it?

Can parents review and approve the types of medical care or treatments their children might receive at these centers?

What outside organizations provide funding or other assistance to the school-based health center?

How does the school district ensure that parents have access to relevant information about the school-based health centers and their operations?

If a student that falls under the mature minor doctrine receives a service or medication that causes negative side effects, who is liable for the outcome?

Will parents have access to the medical file created at the school-based health center?

Does the school-based health center offer emergency contraception?

Minnesota - Saint Paul Public Schools

- AGAPE High School
- Central Senior High School
- Como Park Senior High School
- Creative Arts Secondary
- Gordon Parks High School
- Harding Senior High School
- Highland Park Senior High
- Humboldt Jr/Sr High
- Johnson Senior High
- Washington Technology High School