

SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTERS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

School-based health centers (SBHCs) are proven to be an effective method for addressing medical, behavioral, dental, and vision health needs by meeting students where they are – in school. This healthcare delivery model helps eliminate barriers such as transportation, accessibility, and cost for children and families living in communities with little to no access to healthcare.



What is a school-based health center?

Most school-based health centers provide students with comprehensive medical and behavioral health services; some also have comprehensive dental and vision services. Examples of services provided include:

- Primary care (including Health Check services)
- Chronic disease management (i.e., asthma, diabetes, sickle cell, etc.)
- Immunizations
- Vision and hearing screening
- Lab testing
- Diagnosis and treatment of acute and chronic illnesses and minor injuries
- Behavioral health services (individual, family, and group counseling)
- Sports physicals
- Dental care (including cleaning, fillings, extractions, and restorative procedures)
- Eye exams for prescription glasses
- Referrals to other specialists



What services are excluded from being offered at SBHCs?

- Contraception and/or sex education materials. Georgia law and State Board of Education rules affirm abstinence-based programs in our public schools.
- Surgical procedures.

Where are these centers located?

Georgia currently has over 100 SBHCs operating in 24 counties. The most common locations for SBHCs are:

- Within an existing school building.
- Detached modular unit located on school grounds.
- Mobile unit servicing multiple schools.
- Add-on to an existing school building.

Who can be seen at the SBHC?

SBHCs were developed to serve the students enrolled in the school where the SBHC is located. Over the years, it has been acknowledged that they are suited to serve others in the community. The decision to determine additional patient populations is made by the local school administration, the medical provider, and the community. Possible additional patient populations include:

- Students from other schools in the district.
- Non-school-age siblings of students.
- School faculty and staff, encouraging fewer sick days, higher retention rates, and greater quality instruction.
- Parents of students.
- Community-at-large.

What are the requirements for a student to be seen in the SBHC?

At a minimum, students who are enrolled in the school where the center is located are eligible to receive care. Each student must have a signed parental consent form on record. These are typically provided as part of the student's welcoming packet at the beginning of each school year. The documents can also be signed and collected during the school year.

What are the rights and responsibilities of parents as they relate to SBHC services?

- Parental/legal guardian consent and notification are an essential – and required – part of delivering services to students through SBHCs.
- Parents and legal guardians have the right to utilize SBHC services as they see fit, with the freedom to choose or opt out of services offered.
- Parents and legal guardians can request and receive health information and records for their child at any time. Student health data must follow federal FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) and HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) guidelines.
- Parents and legal guardians can terminate services through the SBHC at any time.

What are the payment options?

All students receive services regardless of the family's ability to pay. Medicaid and private insurance are accepted forms of payment. Resources are available to assist families in signing up for Medicaid and other insurance options.



What types of providers staff the SBHC? Who employs these providers?

The medical sponsor employs all SBHC staff. The medical sponsor also takes full responsibility for medical oversight, billing for provided services, and malpractice insurance. No liability is assigned to the school for the services provided (see the question below regarding who can act as a medical sponsor).

Core staff includes:

- Advanced Practice Practitioner (Nurse Practitioner or Physician’s Assistant)
- Licensed Clinical Social Worker
- Medical Assistant
- Front Office Support Staff

Additional staff includes:

- Dentist
- Dental Assistant/Hygienist
- School Psychologist
- Optometrist
- Health Educator
- Nutritionist
- Community Outreach Worker

Does the SBHC require a medical sponsor?

Yes. The medical sponsor employs and provides medical oversight to the SBHC staff, bills Medicaid and other insurers for services provided, and is responsible for clinical protocols and procedures. It also provides medical malpractice coverage for clinic staff. Possible medical sponsors are:

- Federally Qualified Health Centers
- Community physicians
- Hospital systems
- Faith-based organizations
- Academic medical centers

What about school nurses? Do we need both an SBHC and a school nurse?

Yes! The SBHC and the school nurse can complement each other’s services.

- SBHCs and school nurses coordinate care, providing the best student-centered care possible. Collaboration enhances students’ health, academic outcomes, and overall well-being.
- SBHCs and school nurses work collaboratively to address social needs and advocate as partners for system-level changes to work toward alleviating social determinants of health and their causes.
- SBHCs and school nurses work together to plan and implement health promotion and disease prevention programs.
- By constant communication, continuity of care is fostered inside and outside of the school setting.

How can SBHCs support students and schools?

SBHCs bring medical, behavioral health, and, in some cases, comprehensive dental and vision care to students where they are – in school. This results in healthier students who come to school ready to learn and achieve. It has been proven that using the SBHC increases seat time and decreases early dismissals due to health reasons. It provides parents with an alternative to leaving work to attend to the needs of their children and inappropriate emergency room visits. SBHCs can also impact staff well-being, resulting in fewer teacher absences and reduced use of substitute teachers.



Georgia's Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) program identifies or predicts, through data-driven screening and progress monitoring, students who are at risk for poor learning outcomes or experience connectedness or well-being needs and behavioral concerns that impact learning. SBHCs can work collaboratively with MTSS staff to provide those students with appropriate services (medical and behavioral health) as they are identified. MTSS and SBHCs have shared goals to maximize student achievement and reduce medical and behavioral issues.

What roles do national advocacy groups play in Georgia SBHCs?

- National advocacy groups are not involved in the daily operations of Georgia SBHCs. Georgia SBHCs partner with their local and/or regional qualified healthcare providers.

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