



## EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES

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## Health barriers to learning and the education opportunity gap

Students have a difficult time reaching their potential in school when they don't feel their best. Unfortunately, many students today face a high prevalence of preventable health barriers to learning. Addressing these barriers through sound policy driven by local decision-making is necessary for effective and efficient school reform.

A new report from Education Commission of the States, [Health barriers to learning and the education opportunity gap](#), highlights the important yet sometimes overlooked issue of student health and its relationship to achievement in the classroom. The correlation can be especially profound among students from low-income families.

"School health is not a panacea for improving academic achievement among America's most vulnerable children, but it is an underutilized and highly promising strategy to help children break out of the cycle of poverty," stress the report's authors. "By addressing the significant and crippling impact of health barriers to learning, millions of children will be better prepared, more competitive and able to successfully partake of the opportunities afforded by a 21st century economy."

The report, part of Education Commission of the States' ongoing [Progress of Education Reform series](#), provides a brief history of school health policies, the importance of school health as it relates to school reform, key trends and insight that can help better inform the decisions made by policymakers.

#### *Some important takeaways from this report:*

- Health barriers to learning affect millions of American youth, disproportionately affecting low-income and minority youth.
- School health is not a panacea for improving academic achievement among America's most vulnerable children, but it is an underutilized and highly promising strategy to help children break out of the cycle of poverty by increasing access to educational opportunity.
- The rising healthcare costs that threaten America's economic security, and low levels of fitness and high levels of obesity that threaten America's military readiness, are additional rationales for schools to address health.

*This report was authored by Charles E. Basch, Ph.D, Richard March Hoe Professor of Health and Education at the Department of Health and Behavior Studies, Teachers College, Columbia University; Delaney Gracy, MD, MPH, Chief Medical Officer, Senior Vice President, Medical Affairs at Children's Health Fund; Dennis Johnson, MPS, Executive Vice President, Policy and Advocacy at Children's Health Fund; and Anupa Fabian, MPA, Director of Evaluation at Children's Health Fund.*

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