

Elements of Student Health Support

Healthy students are more likely to [attend school](#) and [engage in learning](#).

Education systems and policies can [impact](#) students' physical, mental and behavioral health — thereby contributing to their overall wellness.

State policymakers have been working to address student health — often by altering curriculum requirements, providing funding support, and instituting professional development or training requirements for school staff.



Health Education

Well-designed and implemented [health education](#) — which provides students with the knowledge and skills they need to understand their bodies and minds — can have several benefits, including improved academic performance and reduction of high-risk behaviors and substance use.



Mental and Behavioral Health

School [mental health](#) support can address the continuum of mental wellness, including prevention and wellness promotion, early identification and targeted intervention and treatment. Student mental wellness is a [key indicator](#) of educational engagement and success, and [most students](#) who receive mental health services begin doing so in a school setting.



Nutrition Services

School meals [alleviate](#) the effects of food insecurity and contribute to overall student development and academic success. Students who participate in [school meal programs](#) show improved attendance and behavioral and academic performance, in addition to lower rates of obesity and improved mental health outcomes.



Physical Activity

Physical activity in school — including [physical education](#) and [recess](#) — provides students with the opportunity to develop motor skills, knowledge and behaviors for active living, general fitness, and social and emotional skills. [Research shows](#) that physical activity can also improve mental health, academic and behavioral outcomes for students.



Physical Environment and Safety

Students and staff alike need to feel safe and comfortable in their school environment to thrive. This includes attention to the design, maintenance and security of the [physical environment](#) as well as physical and emotional [safety](#).



School-Based Health Services

Health services provided at school can include preventative care, vaccinations and health screenings, among other services. [School-based health centers](#) can serve as a common hub for meeting a range of health needs for students and families, including primary medical care, mental and behavioral health care, dental/oral health care, and health and nutrition education.



LEARN MORE

[Healthy Schools Campaign](#)

[National Association of State Boards of Education: School Health Policy Database](#)

[National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments](#)

[School Nutrition Association](#)

[Society of Health and Physical Educators](#)



State Legislative Examples

In 2021 alone, at least 1,126 bills were introduced broadly related to student health; 236 of those were enacted. Full summaries of the enacted bills can be found on the Education Commission of the States [State Education Policy Tracking](#) page. Below are examples of legislation enacted in 2021.

Georgia



Health Education

[H.B. 287](#) adds tobacco and vapor products to the required instruction prescribed by the state board of education as part of the comprehensive health education course, including the skills required to evaluate media portrayals of vapor products. This bill also requires human trafficking awareness instruction to be included in K-12 health and physical education curriculum.

Montana



Mental and Behavioral Health

[H.B. 671](#) requires the office of public instruction to collaborate with the department of public health and human services to support school districts in seeking reimbursement for school-based health and mental health services through Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program.

Nebraska



Nutrition Services

[L.B. 396](#) establishes the farm-to-school program, which may link schools with farms to provide minimally processed food for inclusion in school meals while providing students with hands-on learning around nutrition, gardening, composting and agriculture.

Illinois



Physical Activity

[S.B. 654](#) requires all public schools to provide daily time for play in grades K-5, including unstructured and child-directed play that promotes physical activity. Play time may not be withheld for disciplinary purposes and must be compliant with any student’s individualized education program.

Maryland



Physical Environment and Safety

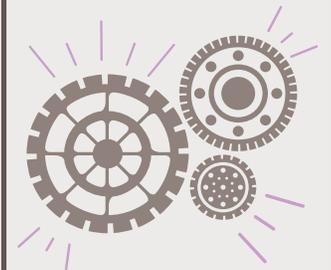
[H.B. 636](#) requires school districts to test school-based water supplies for lead and to address elevated lead levels in schools’ water supplies.

Oregon



School-Based Health Services

[H.B. 2591](#) requires the provision of grants to 10 districts to evaluate and plan for school-based health services. After the completion of the planning grant, funding may be provided to operate a school-based health center or school nurse model. This bill also provides grant funding for school-linked health centers that are mobile and pilot projects aimed at increasing access to mental and behavioral health services through telehealth.



Common State Education Policy Levers

- Curriculum requirements and modification.
- Data and reporting requirements.
- Funding support.
- Pilot programming.
- Program and infrastructure requirements.
- School health-professional ratio requirements.
- Staff training and professional development.