



# SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTERS: THE FAST TRACK TO REACHING FAMILIES IN DETROIT

**Health centers should not be the best kept secret in a community. Raising awareness not only brings new clients but also improves health among young people.**

**Located within select Detroit, MI schools, health centers serve students' physical and emotional needs, keep absenteeism down, and—most importantly—engage families.**



**IMPLEMENTING AUTHENTIC TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION WITH SCHOOLS IS THE PATH TO RETENTION OF CLIENTS, GROWTH OF THE HEALTH CENTER, AND A CONNECTED, VITAL COMMUNITY.**

## → CHALLENGE

A busy parent's dream! A mini doctor's office located within their child's school—for illness, an immunization, a wellness exam, or even a sports physical. School-Based Health Centers are staffed by a variety of providers, including mental health providers. They were founded on the belief that both physical and mental health are essential for student success. How reassuring for a parent to know their child's health needs can be taken care of without them having to take time off work. From the school's point of view, the quicker the child is seen by a health provider, the quicker they can be back in their seat ready to learn.

So what is the challenge? Visibility! In order for School-Based Health Centers to stay open they need to serve clients. Their clients, the students and their families, often are not aware of all that the School-Based Health Center has to offer. Both school staff and the district realize the added value of health centers, but they could benefit from building their infrastructure to support the integration of the health center into identified schools. Further, the merging of health and education language can stifle the communication needed to reach the ultimate goal of healthy and successful students. This "visibility" dilemma revealed missed opportunities to shine a light on the health centers, as well as bring in students and endear families to those caring for their children.

## → SOLUTION

Michigan Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) worked to facilitate communication between the School-Based Health Centers, the school district, and identified schools in Detroit to coordinate needed physical and mental health care and services for students and families. Michigan SS/HS worked to address barriers to learning as well as underutilization of services available through the health center.

A needs assessment was created and given to the lead at each of the health centers. It delved deep into five categories. The information sought after in each of these categories would provide a picture of methods and effectiveness of communication as well as point to where health center staff could get the biggest return on their investment of time.

## A NEEDS ASSESSMENT DOVE DEEP INTO FIVE KEY CATEGORIES:

- 1. Recruitment** – The methods used to obtain student participation (parent and minor consent forms).
- 2. Partnerships With School and Community** – The methods used to build relationships necessary to establishing the health center as an integral part of the school community.
- 3. Marketing** – The methods used to shine light on the health center—that is, to inform school, parents, and community of the services offered to students and the benefits to all of a school-based health center.
- 4. Capacity** – The scope of the health center’s ability to conduct thorough marketing and recruitment.
- 5. Family Engagement** – Perspectives on creating and maintaining partnerships with families.

## → RESULTS

At the time of this writing, the assessment data were still being collected, and a Guidance Document has been outlined. Below are the steps, and the premise behind each step:

- Conduct an analysis from the consumer’s perspective with regard to the level of ease of obtaining information about the health center.
- Create a needs assessment survey to be completed by the lead staff member in each of the health centers. This action alone (of gathering responses within a health center) will raise awareness of opportunities that may have been overlooked. The responses will bring to light similarities and differences in marketing and communication techniques among health centers. Responses will also inform the content of the Guidance Document.
- Summarize results of needs assessment and create a Guidance Document for the health centers on ways to recruit and gain visibility. This includes implementing practices that are proportionate to the human and fiscal resources within the health center.
- Share results of the needs assessment with the health center staff, along with the Guidance Document. This includes a health center action plan for implementing the Guidance Document, monitoring and measuring the outcomes, and adjusting actions along the way.

## → SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Albert Einstein said, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” The first critical step is the willingness of an organization to allow a set of “fresh eyes” from the outside to identify the “low-hanging fruit.” When staff can realistically look at their capacity and select an area where they will realize the biggest return on their investment of time, success will follow. Once staff realize that “what they pay attention to grows,” they will be encouraged to dedicate fiscal and human resources to a realistic marketing strategy.

Research shows that marketing does impact the growth of a business. For those who serve the health needs of young people, being a “business” is a hard concept to accept. However, the marketing success of a business equally applies to Health Centers. Brand awareness is key. Health centers should not be the best kept secret in the community. Raising awareness not only brings new clients but also brings increased health among young people. Identifying key people in the school and community who will then become the sales force is critical for an efficient use of human and fiscal resources.

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