

## DC Action for Children



# Executive Summary

Research from a range of disciplines provides compelling evidence linking the importance of student health with academic performance: when students are healthy, they are better learners. Since all children are required to attend school starting at age five, school health providers are in a unique position to regularly and consistently support student health.

The District of Columbia Department of Health—Community Health Administration (DOH) funds and oversees two major school health programs: The School Nursing Program and School-based Health Centers. In order to ensure that these programs are responsive to the needs of students in DC Public and public charter schools, the DOH commissioned this needs assessment.

The School Health Needs Assessment uses both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive description of how the DOH's current school health programs meet the needs of students. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with key informants across District agencies and health providers as well as through focus groups with parents and students. We analyzed quantitative data that came from a variety of sources to understand the health needs and social determinants of health for DC children and utilization patterns of the current school health programs.

The analysis revealed that students attending DCPS and public charter schools face a variety of chronic conditions in addition to common childhood ailments that can affect their ability to focus in the classroom. While school health plays a critical role in supporting student learning, these services fit in a broader system of care and supports necessary for children to thrive. Based on the data, the DOH should consider these potential next steps to strengthen school health services in an effort to better meet student health needs:

### 1. Establish a shared vision for children's health in the District.

This new vision must be shared with various stakeholders across the District in order to fit school health into a broader system of health care that is child-centered and emphasizes improving health outcomes.

### 2. Improve data collection and systems for school health services.

District agencies and the school sectors should work together to identify opportunities and methods to improve data collection and sharing.

### 3. Create and distribute process documents and training materials that clearly define the roles and responsibilities of school health providers.

### 4. Form a school health collaborative or advisory body.

In order to improve city-wide coordination and to create a forum for vetting new ideas and addressing grievances, DOH could form a school health advisory body that brings together agencies and school leaders to ensure on-going communication and collaboration.

### 5. Implement a more robust evaluation and quality assurance process.

In order to strengthen the school based health program, DOH could collect feedback from school leaders, students and parents about their experiences and satisfaction with services and providers.