



Making the Grade: Working with Families and Schools for Academic Success

Evidence has shown that health and education outcomes are intricately linked. Health related factors such as inadequate nutrition and chronic illness can lead to poor school performance and several adolescent health-risk behaviors have been shown to have an inverse relationship with academic achievement. Pediatricians have a key role in helping identify and mitigate health factors that can affect school performance and in providing anticipatory guidance that can minimize health risk behaviors. Pediatricians can help their patients be healthy and ready to learn.

HELPING ALL CHILDREN

School-aged children and adolescents spend most of their day in the school setting. Consider the following tips to help your patients stay safe and healthy during the school day.

- **Document the school name and your primary contact at the school** as part of the regular health history. The right contact can depend on the child's needs, but in most instances the school nurse will be your first contact at the school. The nurse can help you reach the appropriate person if it is someone else, and they can also help you identify a contact in their absence.
- **Ask school-related questions at each visit** including about how school is going and the number of days the child was absent from school especially related to specific symptoms or health condition(s) since their last visit. You can even ask parents to bring report cards to appointments. This will let kids and parents know that you think school is important.
- **Learn the health requirements for school enrollment** in your area (e.g., immunizations).
- **Learn about communicable disease exclusion criteria, and other policies** such as readmission, medication administration, and transportation policies.
- **Provide information directly to the school** that they need to know and communicate using a method that works best for everyone. Provide clear, specific detailed instructions and use dated standardized forms, when possible.
- **Encourage parents to get involved in their child's education** including attending Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and parent-teacher conferences.

HELPING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATION NEEDS

According to national child health surveys a sizable proportion of children aged 3-17 are affected by special health care and educational needs. For example, recent data indicates:

- 15.1% of US children have special health care needs;
- Nearly 24% of US children are reported to have 1 or more current chronic conditions (from a list of 18 specific conditions)
- 8% of children have been identified as having a learning disability;
- 8% of children have also been identified as having ADHD;
- 9% of children currently have asthma.

It is important to coordinate care with the school so children and adolescents with these conditions receive the care they need during the school day. To help you can:

- **Familiarize yourself with Federal and state laws that serve children with special health care and educational needs** (e.g., Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Do Not Attempt Resuscitation laws).
- **Find out how to participate in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings-in person or by telephone**; if your schedule does not permit, find out how you can share information with the IEP team to help the team make the best decisions for your patient with special needs.
- **Learn how to request/refer patients** for early intervention services, psychoeducational assessments, adaptive physical education and other support services offered by the school.
- **Ask parents for written permission to communicate with the school** when there is a health or social-emotional problem where school input can be helpful and whenever the school needs to provide health services. Note: Review your communications carefully and remove any unrelated health or behavioral information.
- **Find out about your state's Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) and Family to Family Health Information Center (F2F)**. Provide families with information about how to access these resources.

HELPING YOUR COMMUNITY'S CHILDREN

Pediatricians are well-respected members of the community and can serve as a bridge between the education and health systems. Your opinions are highly regarded and school officials often appreciate your expertise and support. Additionally, working with schools allows you to reach a large number of children and their families, reinforce important health promotion messages, and can save practice time. There are many ways you can get involved. Here are a few ways you can work with your local school and/or district to benefit the community:

- **Educate school administrators, staff and families** on important child health issues, especially those that may be addressed in the school setting. Opportunities to do this include, but are not limited to, speaking at PTA meetings or professional development and presenting at school board meetings.
- **Inform, advocate for and assist in developing sound, evidence-based school health policies, practices, and programs**. For example, **volunteer to serve** on your district's Wellness Committee or School Health Advisory Council or as the school physician.
- **Familiarize yourself with the school districts' disaster plan(s)** and offer to provide input as possible.
- **Display posters and/or disseminate handouts** about school-related programs or events in your office. You can also provide information on your web site.

