

Mississippi's *Interdisciplinary Network on School-Health Partnerships* Proposal

Clearly Defined Problem:

The demographics of Mississippi families have changed greatly in recent years. Mississippi has the highest percentage of children living in single parent families in the nation; nearly one in ten children lives with a grandparent, almost double the national average. Seventy-three percent of school-aged children here have working moms. We have the tools that we need before us. We have state agencies whose missions are to prevent disease and poor health outcomes; to promote health and to educate children and youth in school settings. What is new in this effort is a collaborative effort to tie health and education together. By forming a network, our state and the enhancement of health programs can influence knowledge, attitudes and behaviors that relate to health.

One of every three Mississippians is a child: most of them attend school. Children and youth face risks from behaviors they adopt and from the environment in which they live. Many Mississippi youth are at immediate risk for factors such as tobacco use, violence, sexual activity, and poor nutrition. Every two years the Mississippi State Department of Health conducts the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) through collaborative efforts with the Mississippi Department of Education.

The first of the AMERICA 2000 National Education Goals states, "All children in America will start school ready to learn." Recognizing the impact of good health upon one's ability to learn, the Legislature, under Section 37-13-131, Laws of Mississippi, authorizes within the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) an Office of Comprehensive School Health Education to develop, administer and supervise health education programs for grades K-12. It also directs the Department to promote preparation of local school faculties and staffs to incorporate the comprehensive health education concept into their courses. A program of three interdependent components is stipulated: (1) health education, (2) health services, and (3) a healthful school environment.

To implement a comprehensive health education curriculum and coordinate its efforts with colleges and universities, local public schools, and other appropriate agencies, MDE is authorized and required to provide the services of a Director of School Nurses, to coordinate school health services (HB 1771, Section 27 enacted by the 1998 Legislature of the State of Mississippi: Of the funds provided in Section 1, Six Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$600,000.00) shall be used to provide for a Director of School Nurses in the State Department of Education and the implementation of three (3) pilot projects for a variety of school health programs in an elementary school setting. Evaluation shall be developed to determine the program's effect to dropout rates, suspensions, expulsions, attendance and test scores). Though authorized, they are not required to provide a school instruction coordinator, and a school environmental specialist.

MDE's Office of Academic Education has primary responsibility for comprehensive school health education. The curriculum it has developed includes community health, nutrition, environmental health, consumer health, disease prevention/control, family life, drug abuse prevention, mental health, human growth and development, safety and first aid, and personal health.

Comprehensive school health is mandated in Mississippi schools for ninth grade students commencing with the 1994-95 school year. Since 1998, ninth-graders have been required to have from 1/2 to 1 Carnegie Unit in comprehensive school health to graduate.

A vehicle for implementing comprehensive school health education is an HIV/AIDS education contract MDE has with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Its provisions require every Mississippi adolescent affiliated with an educational institution to receive HIV prevention instruction within the context of comprehensive school health education courses. It also seeks to provide access to HIV prevention instruction and health education to school age youth that have dropped out of all educational institutions. To achieve this, comprehensive health education will be required of every student in public and private schools, correctional institutions, detention centers, schools for the mentally retarded, schools for the handicapped, and psychiatric hospitals. It will also be offered in collaboration with businesses and agencies that hire or otherwise deal with high school dropouts.

In some Mississippi school districts, the MDE's school health education instructional efforts are augmented by school nurses and school based clinics programs. There are over 300 school nurses serving in 128 of the 152 school districts throughout the state. School nurse programs are funded in several ways:

- (1) Title I Federal funds - Primarily designed to provide school nurses in areas heavily populated with migrant workers.
- (2) Title II Federal funds - Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, to fund specific programs of instruction; health instruction qualifies under these guidelines.
- (3) Title IV Federal funds - School nurses can be funded when providing education and coordination of safe and drug free schools programs that provide prevention of violence and the illegal use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs in and around schools.
- (4) Title VI Federal funds - Supportive reform efforts funded to provide a continuing source of innovation and educational improvement directly related to special educational needs of at risk students, preschool programs and improved health of students and staff, especially the implementation of life skills that leads to enhanced student achievement.
- (5) Special Education Federal funds - Under IDEA, funds are available to meet the special educational needs of at risk and high cost students.
- (6) Family/Community Health Clinics - Support from communities through willingness to place personnel in school settings to address health care issues, health education and referrals.
- (7) Hospital Association - Provides school nurses to operate school-based clinics that address health care issues, health education and referrals.
- (8) Competitive Grant Process - Defining the need for health services on school campuses and identifying at risk and special needs students.
- (9) State Tobacco Funds /Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi – Allocations to the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) for 50 school district Grants awarded to hire school nurses.

The challenges faced and outcomes expected are noted below.

Challenges: Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are slow to accept and allow dissemination of accurate health education information into the schools due to the diverse needs of the varied district committees.

There is a history of fragmentation in coordinated efforts by all state agencies involved in school health and such a network would enhance efforts. Progress has been made in this regard, but improvement is still needed.

A single voice for funding would solidify the school health efforts as there is no mechanism in place to solicit adequate funding from the legislature. By working together across agencies, more adequate attention can be given to the health needs of the state.

Outcomes: To have coordinated school health prompted from the state level with all stakeholders present and actively working together.

To take ownership to enhance collaboration with other organizations and agencies and share information generated by a group process.

To demonstrate that success rests in the hands of local providers, school personnel, and parents who are willing to do what it takes to make a difference regarding the wellness of Mississippians.

High Level of Commitment:

Activities noted below demonstrate a high level of commitment

The State Department of Education has conducted a three (3) year pilot project, consisting of three (3) grants awarded to school districts or entities on behalf of districts, in the amount of \$150,000 per district, through a competitive Request For Proposal (RFP) process.

The Comprehensive School Health Pilot Program provided incentives for school districts, or entities working with school districts, to implement a school health program operating as a school based health clinic (SBHC) in an elementary school setting.

Grants were awarded to **ONE** district in the northern third of the state, **ONE** district in the central part of the state, and **ONE** district in the southern third of the state.

To be considered as a comprehensive school health program, the program had to address the Comprehensive School Health Program Models eight criteria identified by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), in a comprehensive, integrated manner.

The Eight Components of a Comprehensive School Health Program are School Health Services, Safe and Healthy Environment, School Counseling, Staff (Work Site) Wellness, Integrated School and Community Health Promotion, Physical Education, School Food Services, and Health Education and Instruction.

The program included development of an evaluation plan to determine the program's effect on dropout rates, suspensions, expulsions, attendance, and test scores.

Additional SBHCs have been developed throughout the state by hospitals and community health clinics totaling 33.

The staff of the division of Comprehensive School Health is dedicated to serving all school districts in the state.

There is no provision in the legislation for providing services to private schools.

Conferences/Seminars/Workshops

MDE has devoted several years toward the CSHP through sponsorship of school health and wellness education conferences and workshops, HIV/AIDs prevention training sessions, and ongoing Universal Precautions Seminars/Staff Development and technical assistance to school districts and communities. Such other initiatives have been as follows:

MDE Health and Wellness Conference	June 1998
School Nurse Leadership Academy	September 1999
Comprehensive School Health and Wellness Conference	June 2000
Mississippi alliance for School Health (MASH) Conference	June 2001
Safe and Drug Free Schools Showcase	March 2001

Collaborations

MDE collaborates with many organizations and agencies initiating health related education to school districts and the communities throughout the state. Individuals with the responsibility of coordination of health related programs also participate on health committees and task forces addressing health needs of residents of the state. A sample of entities with which the MDE collaborates includes:

American Cancer Society	American Lung Association
American Red Cross	American Heart Association
Centers for Disease Control	Children's Health Matters
Mississippi Alliance of School Health	Mississippi Forum on Children and Families
Mississippi Department of Human Services	Mississippi Department of Mental Health
Mississippi Division of Medicaid	Mississippi Infant Mortality Task Force

Mississippi State Board of Nurses
Office of the Attorney General
Out of Wedlock Task Force

Mississippi State Department of Health
Office of the Governor of Mississippi
Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi

The state's commitment to school health is evident in law and the effort that is exhibited by the department of education to disseminate its information and offer technical assistance to all school districts. In 1994, the Mississippi legislature passed and the governor signed HB 1019 to strengthen certain components of the school health program and authorize the position of physical education and fitness coordinator. The bill addressed school health education, health services, physical activity and healthy school environment.

Collaboration between the Mississippi Department of Education and the Mississippi State Department of Health has created the formation of the Mississippi Alliance for School Health (MASH) initiative, a non-profit organization comprised of health related affiliates. A school health policy and collaboration exists between these state agencies to enhance coordinated school health education programs, increase public awareness about the need for comprehensive school health programs and define tasks to improve children and adolescent health throughout the state. Most recently an effort was made to have district teams come together to gather information regarding what a coordinated school health program is, develop strategic plans to take back to the district and to implement a coordinated school health program. Program participants were the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and the Attorney General of the State of Mississippi. District collaboration with other community service providers has also been positive.

Aside from improving the health of students now, a mission exists to preserve their future health. School health programs stressing skills for healthy living can increase student knowledge about health issues and insure lifelong health. Healthier students will be more likely to attend school and to graduate. Mississippi is concerned with both health and education as a realization of our children's potential.