# New Report on the Important Role of School-Based Health Services Across

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**Written by: Jessie Mandle**




## School Health Services Overview: Promoting Student Health, Wellness and Success

Schools play a vital role in helping children and families stay healthy. Over the past year, Utah schools experienced a heightened focus on their role in promoting student health and wellness. Yet even before the pandemic, schools were critically important serving students with complex medical needs or chronic conditions, helping students access preventive care and supporting students' mental and behavioral health.

Across Utah, school-based health care services are historically under-resourced and fragmented. Most notably, Utah has a significant school nursing shortage; there is only one nurse for every 2,789 students statewide. That ratio exceeds national recommendations for one full-time nurse for every school.

In addition, Utah has only 5 designated school-based health centers. A school does not need to have a designated school-based health center to offer quality care or services. Nevertheless, Utah's low number of school-based health centers combined with our alarming nurse- to- student ratio points to a chronic under-investment in school health services and sustainable funding streams. Instead, most


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Utah schools take a patchwork approach when it comes to funding health care services funding and providers.

## Utah School Health Services Survey: What are schools providing now and what do they need?

In order to strengthen and improve school-based services as a state, we wanted to understand the current landscape of school health services, and recognize schools' unique assets and challenges when it comes to providing services.

To begin to answer this question, Voices for Utah Children conducted a statewide survey in Spring 2021. The survey was conducted with the support of local, state and national partners. Representatives in school districts across Utah were surveyed about the scope of services offered.

This survey, discussed in our new report here, is a starting point to elevate the critical role of school health services and school health care providers.

## Policy Recommendations Based on Survey Findings

- **Leverage Medicaid funds to expand school health services and hire more health care providers.** School districts and the Utah State Board of Education should coordinate with the Utah Medicaid Division to leverage Medicaid funds for any Medicaid-enrolled student, including students without Individualized Education Plans. This is an option available to districts, but not currently being utilized. Medicaid funds can be braided with other funding streams to support a range of health services.

- **Allocate state funding for more school, district and/or public health nurses.** National and state experts recommend at least one nurse per school. Utah needs more school nurses!

- Use federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to improve data coordination and sharing systems, and translation/ interpretation systems in schools to allow for improved health service delivery.

- **Expand telehealth opportunities in schools**, including platforms and


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providers. Telehealth is under-utilized in many schools currently. But telehealth capacity and technology is growing rapidly and can help meet student need.

- **Create an FTE at the state-level to coordinate physical health services across schools and develop a shared statewide system**. Currently, several state positions support school health, but no position oversees all services or one system supports coordination. This person could help connect resources and available mobile clinics and align with the new state mental health coordinating council.

- Finally, **Utah should invest in more designated school health centers**, including additional school-based health or wellness centers. Every district should have at least one school health center or wellness center.

*Schools are critical health resources and anchor institutions in our communities. Strengthening and lifting up school-based health care is a key strategy to help students, families and communities stay healthy and stay learning.*

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**Check out survey findings and our new report to learn more!**



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