

SBHC Testimony April 26, 2022

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As a practicing Pediatrician with over 20 years of experience, I appreciate the opportunity to expound upon the benefits of School Based Health Centers to our patients, our schools, and our communities.

In 2017, Keystone Health, a large Federally Qualified Health Center in South Central Pennsylvania, recognized the tremendous need for healthcare delivery in school. Issues like chronic student truancy, infectious disease spread, teenage pregnancy, incomplete vaccinations, and student mental health were wearing our school nurses down and served as the impetus for us to open a School based Health Center at our local public high school, Chambersburg Area Senior High School. To accomplish this, we sought no public funds, nor did we ask the school district for financial assistance.

Since then, we have treated countless acute issues, like sprains, ear infections, and strep throat; saving the parents the need to take time off work, pick up their child, and bring them into an urgent care. But our impact has been felt in other ways also. Many children have been able to be treated in school, serious issues ruled out, AND sent back to class, minimizing school absences and reducing truancy.

During the heart of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many school districts struggled to keep schools open, and parents struggled to find available, rapid COVID testing for their children to differentiate a common cold from COVID, we were performing COVID testing right in our SBHC. Countless children were seen by our staff, COVID swabbed and in 15 minutes were either sent back to class because they were negative...or isolated and sent home because they were positive. We believe we were able to effectively abort the spread of COVID-19 by testing children in school and eliminating all barriers to accessing care.

I'd also like to relay a quick story from 2 years ago about a 16 year old girl who sought care at our SBHC because she had missed her period and was afraid she was pregnant. We saw her confidentially, performed a test which confirmed her pregnancy, and counselled her on the importance of prenatal care. She confided that she was afraid to tell her parents of her pregnancy and was unsure of how to get connected with the care she needed. She was scared and alone, but she needed help. Knowing we had an obligation to help, we contacted our OB practice affiliated with our Health Center and arranged for an Obstetrician to come to the SBHC to provide her with prenatal care until she was ready to divulge to her parents.

These are the reasons SBHC's are essential. They keep kids in school who should be in school, and they identify those that are spreading infectious diseases and are too sick to be there. They provide access for children to receive care in a convenient fashion, saving parents time off work. But most importantly, they can be a trusted place for our students to seek care, when they are scared or worried and have nowhere else to turn.

Please know, too, that the pandemic has only further intensified the complexity of our student's healthcare needs, solidifying the importance of SBHC's for our children.