

# HEALTHY SCHOOLS CAMPAIGN

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **We Must Act Now to Expand Critical Health Services for Illinois Children**

*More than 50 organizations sign on urging Governor Pritzker to support  
the expansion of school-based Medicaid programs*

(CHICAGO, IL) – Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC) together with 52 organizations have called on Governor J.B. Pritzker to support expanding Illinois' School Medicaid Program. Supporters represent health service providers, hospitals, and health and education advocacy, philanthropy and community-based organizations from across the state.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the critical role that schools play in providing health services to students,” said Rochelle Davis, CEO, Healthy Schools Campaign. “Illinois has an important opportunity to dramatically expand comprehensive school-based physical and mental and behavioral health services for the state’s most vulnerable children by making a simple change to its Medicaid policy.”

For nearly 20 years, under a longstanding federal policy known as the Free Care Rule, school districts could bill Medicaid only for health services included in a student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and under other limited conditions. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) reversed this policy, and school districts are now able to receive reimbursement for all eligible services delivered to all students enrolled in Medicaid. As students with IEPs represent a mere 14 percent of these students in both Illinois and Chicago, moving to expand reimbursement to all Medicaid-enrolled students has the potential for tremendous impact on struggling school district budgets and the provision of school health services.

“It is more crucial than ever to ensure strong health and wellness policies and programs are in place for Illinois children,” said Dr. Colleen Cicchetti, Executive Director, Center for Childhood Resilience, Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago. “Increasing access to school health services, including mental and behavioral health supports, is a proven strategy for improving educational and healthcare outcomes, including reducing overall healthcare system costs and improving the quality of and access to care.”

By expanding school-based Medicaid programming, school districts will have the opportunity to draw down additional, sustainable federal funding for school health services and expand health services and staffing for children. Of the nearly 2 million students in Illinois, approximately 40 percent (800,000) are enrolled in Medicaid, including approximately 235,000 students in Chicago alone - meaning huge impact for the health and education of Illinois youth.

For Illinois to leverage this opportunity, it must first update its Medicaid state plan by submitting a State Plan Amendment (SPA) to CMS for approval. The Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services is

the state agency responsible for engaging with CMS on behalf of Illinois. This process does not require any state or local legislative changes and is a budget-neutral policy change for Illinois.

“School based services were highly necessary even prior to the unprecedented global pandemic, and additional resources are desperately needed now more than ever,” shared Melissa McCutchen, Licensed Clinician Social Worker, Johnston City School District. “Expanding our Medicaid program is a sensible and sustainable way to get more school nurses, social workers, psychologists, and other health staff in schools helping students.”

Benefits of expanding school health services through Medicaid:

- Improve access to healthcare
- Reduce health disparities
- Improve student attendance
- Improve academic outcomes
- Support sustainable revenue for schools
- Increase funding for school health providers
- Reduce overall healthcare costs

As of August 2020, 13 states have successfully expanded their school-based Medicaid programs through this opportunity, two states have approvals pending with CMS, and many more are expected to do so in the coming year. Many states are also using this opportunity to expand the types of physical and behavioral health services eligible for reimbursement and update the list of eligible school health providers.

For more information on expanding school health services in Illinois, view the sign-on letter, and see the impact in other states, visit <https://healthyschoolscampaign.org/illinois-school-health-services/>.

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