



NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S®

When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.

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Proponent Testimony for SB 121

Chairwoman Lehner, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide proponent testimony for SB 121, which would require the State Board of Education to adopt health education standards for students in grades K-12.

My name is Mary Kay Irwin, and I am Director of School Health Services for Nationwide Children's Hospital. Our hospital is committed to ensuring children and adolescents experience the best possible health outcomes when they are sick, but just as importantly, we help provide children and families with the tools to stay well. I'd like to share how our work in Columbus-area schools fulfills both of those goals – and how it has proven to me that health education standards can improve child health throughout Ohio.

Care Connection is a program and partnership between Nationwide Children's, local schools, families and community physicians. Care Connection provides access to health care and wellness services for children and adolescents inside their school. Services are intended to reach those who do not have a regular doctor and do not routinely seek care from a primary care physician. Our programs include:

- School health clinics located inside 13 central Ohio schools, offering physicals, immunizations, sick appointments, bloodwork, and other services
- School-based behavioral health services providing counseling in over 60 schools and prevention services and support for teachers in well over 100 area schools
- Two Mobile Care Centers, providing health care to an additional 20 schools, homeless shelters, early childhood centers and community centers in high-need neighborhoods throughout Franklin County
- School-based Asthma Therapy Clinic, in over 250 schools, providing care for high-risk asthmatics
- Wheelchair Clinic, adapting, repairing and fitting wheelchairs for growing children
- In partnership with area teachers, Care Connection staff offer wellness education programs with an average reach of 2,000 students participating annually



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Offering our services in the community and in schools provides a unique access to care for children and adolescents who previously were not receiving routine healthcare. Through this partnership, we are not only improving critical health outcomes, but we are also successful in improving student attendance and decreasing rates of discipline.

Through our school-based work, we have the opportunity to witness first-hand the negative implications of lacking health education. We have seen countless students whose lack of knowledge about their own bodies, about common health conditions and about the effects of smoking, vaping and drug use have already led to preventable outcomes. In the realm of pediatric mental health, our local experience bears out the shocking national statistics:

- 11% of children 8-11 years of age have had a mental illness with severe impairment
- 22% of teens 13-18 years of age have had a similarly impairing mental illness
- 50% of all mental illness starts by age 14

It is well known that students who have their physical and mental health needs met are better learners. They miss school less often. They concentrate better. Health education standards are an immediate, cost-effective, and comprehensive way to reach Ohio's children and adolescents. There is no better form of prevention than knowledge. Health education standards will ensure students receive critical knowledge and skills to make healthy choices resulting in prevention of chronic disease, delayed risky behaviors and awareness of when and how to get help when encountering illness or unsafe situations.

It is time Ohio aligns with the rest of the nation to implement health education standards. On behalf of Nationwide Children's Hospital, thank you for allowing me to testify on SB 121.