



**Ohio School-Based Health Alliance**  
**House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education**  
House Bill 33- FY24-25 State Operating Budget  
Interested Party Testimony  
March 22, 2023

Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and Members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 33, the state operating budget.

My name is Reem Aly, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio School-Based Health Alliance (“Ohio Alliance”). The Ohio Alliance is an independent, professional, nonpartisan, nonprofit<sup>1</sup> organization. We serve as the only statewide organization created to improve access to comprehensive, integrated health services through school-based health care and are committed to improving health and education outcomes for Ohio’s students, their families, and communities.

The Ohio Alliance supports the proposed appropriation of \$15 million for the 2024 and 2025 State Fiscal Years for school-based health centers and continued strengthening of Ohio’s school-based health center infrastructure. The Ohio Alliance also respectfully requests your consideration to move the appropriation from the Department of Education, where it currently resides, to the Department of Health.

***School-based health center overview***

Across Ohio, school-based health centers serve as a leading, evidence-driven model for advancing school-based health care and connecting children and communities to critical healthcare services. These centers are created through a partnership between a school/school district and a healthcare provider to increase access to, at minimum, primary healthcare services to students. The healthcare provider serves as the operator and administrator of the school-based health center, working closely with the school or school district to meet student health needs.

We have school-based health centers that have been serving communities in Ohio for several decades, and Ohio has led the nation in the establishment of comprehensive school-based health centers. These centers provide access to primary healthcare services, and often also provide access to behavioral, oral, and vision health services. The primary focus of school-based health centers is to deliver health care to students. However, depending on school and community needs, school-based health centers can also provide health care to: school personnel and faculty, families of students, and community members. In this capacity, school-based health centers serve as a multi-generational approach to improving access to health care. In some rural, Appalachian, and urban regions of Ohio that are underserved, school-based health centers are the only available healthcare provider for students, families, and community members.

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<sup>1</sup> The Ohio Alliance was relaunched in 2021 as a fiscally sponsored initiative of [Health Impact Ohio](#), a 501(c)(3) Regional Healthcare Improvement Collaborative based in Columbus, Ohio.

### ***Need for school-based health centers***

We know that health is an important factor that contributes to a child's success both inside and outside of school. Students who are sick or who have unaddressed health conditions often cannot focus inside the classroom and are more likely to miss school altogether. When a child is not in school, their education is negatively impacted. The consequences they face from interruptions in their education carry throughout their lifetime — including a greater risk for poor health as an adult, higher healthcare spending, and increased economic instability in their future.

The sobering reality is that our children face increasing health and education challenges. Over the past few years, these challenges have only been exacerbated by the pandemic, resulting in a worsening of outcomes and widening of disparities.

- More than one in eight children (13.1%) reported being depressed or having anxiety in 2020, up 42% percent from 2016 (9.3%).<sup>2</sup>
- Nearly one in three (30%) Ohio K-12 students were chronically absent in the 2021-2022 school year, up 25% from the year prior.<sup>3</sup>

Even more concerning, we find that many Ohio children do not have access to the comprehensive and timely healthcare services they need to improve their health and reduce obstacles to academic achievement. **In fact, one in every five (21.6%) school-age children, ages 6-17, does not have a place to go or consult when they are sick.**<sup>4</sup>

### ***Impact of school-based health centers***

School-based health centers bring health care to where our youngest Ohioans spend most of their time – school – placing children at the center of services and delivering care in a safe and nurturing environment. They also provide critical supports for hard working parents or guardians who, for example, may be unable to take time off work to take a child to a healthcare provider or who lack transportation. This collaborative, public-private health and education partnership is transformational in improving student health and education outcomes and closing gaps in outcomes. In addition, by removing barriers to accessing needed health care, school-based health centers achieve substantial efficiencies and cost savings including:

- **Reducing high costs to the healthcare system and Medicaid**, resulting from reduced emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and improved medication management;
- **Keeping parents at work so they are better able to support their families**, and preventing work productivity loss for employers;
- **Keeping kids in school**, and providing the health services and supports they need to be ready to learn.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Child Wellbeing Indicators & Data: Kids Count Data Center." KIDS COUNT data center: A project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2022. <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#OH/2/0/char/0>. Last accessed February 3, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> "Chronic Absenteeism Trend." *Ohio Department of Education Reports*. Available at <https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-state-attendance-rate-with-student-disagg>. Last accessed February 3, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> National Survey on Children's Health, 2020-2021. Available at [NSCH Interactive Data Query \(2016 – present\) - Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health \(childhealthdata.org\)](https://www.nscch.org/data-queries). Last accessed February 3, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Guo JJ, Wade TJ, Pan W, Keller KN. School-based health centers: cost-benefit analysis and impact on healthcare disparities. *Am J Public Health*. 2010 Sep;100(9):1617-23. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2009.185181. Epub 2010 Jul 15. PMID: 20634450; PMCID: PMC2920971.



Equally important, school-based health centers allow teachers and school staff to focus on their role as educators and supporting Ohio's students to be academically prepared for the future.

***Moving forward***

The Ohio Alliance again expresses its support for the \$15 million (GRF 200488) allocated for school-based health centers. The Ohio Alliance believes these dollars will be critical for school-based health centers that were recently created and expanded through Governor DeWine and his administration's initiative in the Spring of 2022, to maintain and sustain operations in the short term to achieve long-term sustainability. Given the Ohio Department of Health's experience working with school-based health center providers and recognizing that school-based health centers are a model for removing barriers to healthcare access, we respectfully request these dollars be moved to the Ohio Department of Health, working in collaboration with the Ohio Department of Education. We are happy to work in partnership with both the Ohio Department of Health and the Ohio Department of Education to assess how these funds can be most effectively and efficiently utilized.

To meet the growing needs of Ohio's children, our state's school-based health center and healthcare infrastructure must be strengthened. The expansion and support of school-based health centers is much needed to ensure that, in the face of rising health and education challenges, students can receive access to critical healthcare services and families are supported in caring for their children. Consequently, the Ohio Alliance also supports growing the impact of school-based health centers across Ohio through opportunities for enhanced funding to create and expand new school-based health center sites.

We look forward to collaborating with the Ohio General Assembly and working together to ensure Ohio's children are healthy, ready to learn, and better able to thrive. On behalf of the Ohio Alliance and our school-based health care partners, we appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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