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A Picture of Health: School Health Services in Kentucky Examined in New Report
Promising Practices Apparent, but Sustainability and Budgets a Concern

Jeffersontown, KY – As schools across the Commonwealth, and the country, wrestle to improve test scores and other accountability measures, there is a growing awareness about the impact that factors such as children's health and wellness have on school performance. Many districts in Kentucky have recognized this in recent years and intervened by providing school health services to meet students' health needs at school. Until now, however, detailed information on school health services offered in Kentucky districts was not available.

Today, Kentucky Youth Advocates and the University of Louisville release the findings of a study on districts' school health services during the 2008-2009 school year. The project, funded by the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky, included a voluntary survey sent to Kentucky's 174 public school districts and a survey sent to Kentucky health care providers. Results included 137 responding districts which covers more than 80 percent of the student population in Kentucky. [*A Picture of Health: A Report of Kentucky School Districts' Health Services*](#), provides a comprehensive view of the range of school health services and highlights promising practices to address the health needs of the Commonwealth's public-school children.

"If we ask schools to improve academic outcomes, we must also give them the resources they need to improve health and wellness, as these are intricately linked with student performance. Children can only fully reach their potential and succeed when they are healthy, both physically and emotionally. Barriers, including a lack of health insurance, problems with access to care such as transportation issues, and time constraints for parents who work full time hinder many children from receiving the health care they need," said Terry Brooks, Executive Director of Kentucky Youth Advocates. "If children's health is a priority in Kentucky, schools need funding for school health."

A Picture of Health analyzed school health services funding, providers, and the types of services offered including physical, dental and mental health/substance abuse services. Notable findings include:

- Most school districts spend less than one percent of their budgets on school health services (The report considered only direct spending by school districts but in many cases, school districts leverage community partners such as local health departments, universities or other organizations to significantly increase levels of support for school services).
- Mental health/substance abuse and dental health services are provided less frequently than physical health services.
- School nurses are the most common health providers in Kentucky schools.
- Kentucky does not meet the nationally recommended school nurse-to-student ratio.

“While some school districts meet or exceed the national recommendation of 1 nurse for every 750 students, others do not come close,” said Brooks. “There are a number of districts in Kentucky making great strides with the little funding they have. We want all children from Pikeville to Paducah, and every city and rural area in between, to have the same opportunities to be healthy and succeed in school. *A Picture of Health* helps us understand how our schools remove health barriers to learning so children can be successful in school.”

In order to make the most of limited resources, several promising practices emerged from the study including fully utilizing Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (FRYSC) in coordinating care and creating strong health department partnerships to maximize services.

“The Foundation supports studies such as this, to be sure policy makers have the information they need about health services offered in Kentucky schools,” said Susan Zepeda, Ph.D., president and CEO of the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky. “Our approach centers on investing in communities and informing health policy through funding for targeted research and demonstration projects.”

The future of school health services in Kentucky is a core issue in the recent Medicaid debate. Current efforts by Governor Beshear to expand managed care in order to capture savings in Kentucky’s Medicaid Program have the potential to affect funding streams for school health services.

“The national lesson is clear – managed care can be a catalyst to or a barrier for school health services. We encourage the Governor to consider the importance of school health services as he expands managed care,” said Brooks.

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Kentucky Youth Advocates is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization. KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.

The Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky is a non-profit, philanthropic organization focused on investing in communities and informing health policy. Through grants, research and educational forums, the Foundation supports the development of health policy with a current focus on improving fitness and nutrition for children and families, youth smoking and substance abuse prevention, health care for low-income, uninsured or rural populations, and integrated mental health and medical services. For more information, please visit www.healthy-ky.org.

University of Louisville: The Urban Studies Institute (USI) is an applied social policy and economic research center serving the Louisville metropolitan area and the Commonwealth of Kentucky. It was founded in 1966 to provide research services to local, regional, and Commonwealth offices and agencies. Faculty and students from the Department of Urban and Public Affairs work closely with USI staff and maintain offices in the USI facility. The Survey Research Center at the Urban Studies Institute maintains a computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) system. In addition, web surveys have been conducted by USI since 2004.