

Schools Play an Important Role in Building Healthy Communities

Education and health go hand in hand as education is an important predictor of overall health outcomes. Schools impact the health of communities, whether it is a school in an urban neighborhood or a rural community, schools are the hub of activity and play a huge role in building and strengthening the community.

The Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health is dedicated to giving back to Idaho and addressing the root causes that impact health. We're in Idaho for Idaho, which is why we work to remove barriers to education and engage with schools, communities, and organizations to build a healthier Idaho.

Here are some highlights of our recent work and partnerships in education:

- We worked with 49 schools from 34 school districts in 23 Idaho counties in 2022.
- We supported eight education-focused conferences and conventions that provided professional development for Idaho education professionals, including teachers, school counselors, school social workers, school administrators, and school board members.
- We are funding a pilot project to place a school nurse in a rural school and identifying how the project could be replicated for other rural districts.

Our work in education is rooted in our commitment to helping Idaho students reach their full potential, starting with early childhood education and continuing throughout the K-12 setting. We also help Idaho students pursue their education beyond high school.

Here is a look at our focus areas and how we are supporting Idaho students, schools, districts, and communities:

Early Childhood Education

Access to early education and quality childcare opportunities is critical to kindergarten readiness.

We have assisted the Castleford and Homedale school districts to launch early childhood education programs and supported the Nezperce School District expansion of its program from three to five days a week. This provides much-needed childcare and preschool in those communities and helps prepare children for kindergarten. We've also supported the Lincoln County Youth Center, which offers preschool and an after-school program that serves children from the communities of Richfield, Shoshone, and Dietrich.

Behavioral Health

Idaho is experiencing a youth behavioral health crisis.

- Idaho's suicide rate is 46% higher than the national average
- Idaho is ranked 47th in the nation in prevalence of mental illness and rates to access care
- All of Idaho's 44 counties have an identified shortage of behavioral health providers

A recent survey of middle school and high school students at a rural Idaho school revealed:

- 66% of students reported moderate to severe depression
- 23% admitted suicidal ideation in the past six months
- 69% indicated that other students are NOT nice

One way we're addressing this behavioral health crisis is through the Healthy Minds Partnership, a program that helps schools offer on-campus counseling services to students. This increases student access to necessary healthcare while eliminating some of the common barriers, such as transportation and parents' time away from work to transport children to appointments. We've helped more than 30 schools start the Healthy Minds Partnership, which helps children miss fewer learning opportunities because of the convenience of getting seen at school.

We've found that districts with school-located behavioral health programs almost always expand them to other schools in the district because of how well they work. Under Idaho law, these school-located behavioral health services can be billed to private insurance or Medicaid, resulting in almost no expense for the school or district, which is another benefit to the districts.

Community Schools

Community schools are schools created to help all kids succeed. The Community Schools Strategy transforms a school into a place where educators, local community members, families, and students work together to strengthen conditions for student learning and healthy development. As partners, they organize in- and out-of-school resources, supports, and opportunities so that young people thrive.

In Idaho, that means local school officials listen to parents and families to learn what additional resources are needed for kids to reach their full potential. Community schools connect students to those services as needed in a school setting. That could mean healthcare, before- and after-school programming, or addressing food insecurity.



We offer support to school districts interested in exploring the possibility of operating as a community school. We've partnered with the Idaho Coalition for Community Schools to provide training and technical assistance opportunities to 22 districts/schools across Idaho. We and additional partners are currently funding a three-year implementation grant for seven school districts – Cascade, Coeur d'Alene, Homedale, Jefferson County, Minidoka, Mountain Home, and Notus – to hire a community school coordinator and implement and expand their Community Schools Strategy.

Scholarship Programs

We've funded scholarship programs with many Idaho colleges and universities. Many of these programs are designed to support students who are majoring in healthcare-related fields or are in medical school.

Our state has a healthcare workforce shortage. There aren't enough doctors, nurses, behavioral health counselors, and other important healthcare workers in Idaho, especially in remote parts of the state. We're hoping these multiyear scholarship programs with the College of Idaho, Lewis-Clark State College, University of Idaho, Idaho WWAMI Medical Education, and Idaho State University will help address these workforce challenges.

The Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health makes these investments in education because it helps build a healthier Idaho. By removing barriers to education and engaging with schools, communities, and organizations, we're fulfilling our mission of giving back to Idaho.

To learn more about the Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health, please visit our website: <https://www.bcidahofoundation.org/> or contact:

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