

# Help Everyone Achieve At Least High School Graduation



## Why should I care?

When asked for one thing his community should do to improve the health of its citizens, Adewale Troutman, then director of the health department in Louisville, Kentucky, said: “Make sure that everyone graduates from high school.”<sup>1</sup> Why would someone from the city’s health department have schools on his mind?

**Because high school graduates tend to lead longer and healthier lives** than their peers who drop out.<sup>2</sup> This is partly due to a graduate’s ability to earn more money and afford better health care and housing in safer neighborhoods. But by completing a high school education, graduates also have an opportunity to learn more at school about health – promoting behaviors like healthy eating and physical activity. Graduates are more likely to practice healthy behaviors and have a better chance of growing a strong social support network.

While high school graduation rates reached a record high in 2014-2015 at 83 percent<sup>3</sup>, high schools still lost nearly 750,000 students to dropout in 2012,<sup>4</sup> with a national dropout rate of nearly 6 percent in 2015<sup>5</sup>. Students do not graduate for a number of reasons, many of which relate to their social circumstances. For example, they may have to provide care for a relative or child or get a job to support themselves or their loved ones. Other barriers to graduation include bullying, absenteeism, undiagnosed or unmanaged medical conditions or mental health issues, and chronic stress related to social and environmental circumstances.

To help at-risk students overcome such barriers to graduation, APHA is pushing for school-based health centers that help students with their physical, mental and social well-being in their teenage years so they can graduate and be healthier for the rest of their lives. The results are very promising:<sup>6</sup>

- Students who receive mental health services at school-based health centers have 50 percent fewer missed days of school.
- African-American boys enrolled in school-based health centers are three times more likely to stay in school.

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<sup>1</sup> APHA Center for School, Health and Education: Graduation is a Public Health ROI. <https://goo.gl/Cpy2Ya>

<sup>2</sup> CDC: Reframing School Dropout as a Public Health Issue: [www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2007/oct/07\\_0063.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2007/oct/07_0063.htm)

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Education Statistics: [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_coi.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_coi.asp)

<sup>4</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education: <http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/NoAccident.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> National Center for Education Statistics: [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_coj.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_coj.asp)

<sup>6</sup> APHA The Dropout Crisis: A Public Health Problem and the Role of School-Based Health Care: [www.schoolbasedhealthcare.org](http://www.schoolbasedhealthcare.org)

## What can I do?

**Support School-Based Health Centers.** As of 2013-2014, more than 2,300 school-based health centers were serving students in nearly every state and Washington, D.C., but many more families could still benefit from their services.<sup>7</sup> [Find out whether your school has one](#), and if it does not, become a local champion for creating a school-based health center in your community. You'll simultaneously be helping students in your community graduate and be healthier for life. Learn more from APHA's [Center for School, Health and Education](#).

**Become a mentor.** Positive adult relationships are critical for the health and well-being of children and adolescents. School-based health centers are known for building strong bonds with students. Contact local programs in your community for mentorship opportunities!

**Get involved in your local community.** For example, contact your local school or after-school program and ask about volunteer opportunities. Coach a local youth sports club, volunteer with kids programs at your local library or join a tutoring organization. If you're passionate about healthy food access, become a member of your community's food policy task force and support youth and family homeless shelters. Or consider donating your old washer and dryer to under-resourced schools so students in need have a place to wash their school clothes.

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<sup>7</sup> School-Based Health Alliance, National Census of School-Based Health Centers: [www.sbh4all.org/school-health-care/national-census-of-school-based-health-centers](http://www.sbh4all.org/school-health-care/national-census-of-school-based-health-centers)



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