

◆ **Recommended Component:**
Assure Access to a Consulting Physician/Healthcare Provider for Each School

A school's consulting physician/healthcare provider serves several roles to help manage a school's health services, including helping school nurses communicate with students' own physicians (or other healthcare providers), establishing and reviewing protocols and prescribing standing medications. Generally, there is a single consulting physician assisting an entire school district.

Physicians can play many roles within a school district. Depending on the district, the school physician may play a role in any or all of the components of a coordinated school health program. In addition, the school physician may act as a liaison to community providers and sit on the school health advisory council.

Having a physician consultant need not be an expensive endeavor. Small districts often contract with physicians for only a few hours each year. A consulting school physician who has training and experience in child, adolescent, or school health can work with school nurses and others on the health team to guide district health policy, interact with the medical community, and/or assume specific clinical responsibilities. In addition, they can assist districts communicate more efficiently with students' physicians/healthcare providers on complex health problems. Although consulting school physicians should be board certified in pediatrics, adolescent medicine, and/or family medicine, in rural areas, a general practitioner or a county public health physician can provide many components of the school physician role. See the sample Position Description: Consulting Physician included with this hand-out.

Assuring Access to a Healthcare Provider Checklist

- Educate decision-makers about need for consulting physician
- Solicit community support
- Identify funding sources

To initiate a system incorporating a consulting physician, consider the following steps.

- ▶ **Educate decision-makers about the need for a consulting physician.** A school district should specify the physician's/healthcare provider's role in a written agreement. Depending on resources and need, physicians/healthcare providers can be assigned to a school district for as little as a few hours per year to as much as full-time.
- ▶ **Solicit community support.** Work with individuals and organizations who can help you initiate a consulting physician/healthcare provider program, including the department of public health, medical schools and public health programs within local universities, state leaders of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American Academy of Family Physicians, as well as local healthcare providers.
- ▶ **Identify Funding Sources.** A consulting physician/healthcare provider may be a volunteer or someone who works on a very limited-hours or full-time contract basis, depending on each school's or district's needs. Work with community leaders (listed above) to help identify funding sources, such as foundations, managed-care organizations, etc.

REFERENCE MATERIALS

❖ Position Description: Consulting Physician



POSITION DESCRIPTION:
Consulting Physician/Community Healthcare Provider

What are the responsibilities of consulting physicians, or school-contracted doctors, to improve school health services?

1. Assist in the development of school or district health programs.
2. Develop health and safety policies.
3. Provide health education to school staff.
4. Consult on health education programs and curricula.
5. Form linkages between schools and physicians/clinics in their neighborhoods.
6. Assist with health-oriented grant applications.
7. Advocate on behalf of schools and districts.
8. Communicate with students' own physicians when there are medical issues that the school must address.
9. Act as on-call consultants to school nurses.
10. Help to inform physicians/community health providers in the community about:
 - school health policies
 - school health needs
 - the school health environment
11. Help to evaluate and assess school health programs.

Notes:

- a. Consulting physicians do not take on students as their own patients!
- b. For asthma, some physicians in the community are more likely to modify their diagnosis or management after having discussed the case with a fellow physician (a school physician/community healthcare provider who is knowledgeable about asthma) than they are after having spoken to a non-health professional or even a school nurse. It is not the school physician's role to diagnose, assess the clinical status or treat students directly (unless there is a school-based clinic). The school physician can update school nurses and other school staff on asthma management issues. The school physician can assist the nurses with identifying regular protocols and forms as well as emergency procedures related to asthma.

