

CASE EXAMPLE

OHIO SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH ALLIANCE FOOD ACCESS LEARNING NETWORK

Partnership Development

Background

The Ohio School-Based Health Alliance (Ohio Alliance) is Ohio's only nonpartisan, statewide organization created to advance and support the sustainability and expansion of school-based health care. The organization's mission is to improve access to comprehensive, integrated health services through school-based health care to advance equity and improve health and education outcomes for students, their families, and communities. The Ohio Alliance furthers its mission by serving as the state's strategic voice, thought leader, technical assistance provider, resource center, and connector on school-based health care. Since 2010, the Ohio Alliance has been designated as the state affiliate of the national School-Based Health Alliance.

Based on the Ohio Alliance's most recent [census](#) for the 2023-2024 school year, Ohio is home to 135 verified school-based health center (SBHC) sites¹, serving 74 school districts and 794 school buildings in the state. SBHCs are in a little over 40% of Ohio's counties (37 of Ohio's 88 Counties) and in every quadrant of the state. While the earliest SBHC site in Ohio was established in 1995, approximately 62% (84) of Ohio's sites were established in the past five years. Ohio is also home to many other innovative school-based health care models, such as mobile health, telehealth exclusive, and school-linked.

In fall 2023, the Ohio Alliance received grant funding through a partnership between School-Based Health Alliance (SBHA) and Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry to establish a Food Access & Innovation Learning Network of SBHCs. SBHC sites selected to participate in the Learning Network were required to integrate universal food insecurity screening and referral workflows into their site operations and care delivery.

The overarching goals of the project were to:

Integrate food access interventions into health center services and workflows.

Improve food security for youth and their families.

Improve dietary health and connection to preventative care.

Provide greater understanding for how nutrition assistance in SBHC services can be supported at the state level.

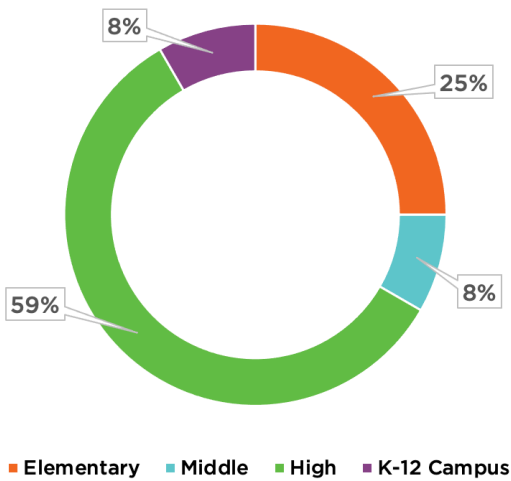
¹ For the purposes of the census, SBHC sites are all co-located in a school building/on a school campus and provide, at minimum, primary care services to students. As of July 2024, there are at least an additional 18 SBHCs that are operating or planned to open in calendar year 2024 that were not verified in the census.

Getting Started

The Ohio Alliance issued a request for proposals (RFP) for SBHC provider sponsors interested in addressing food access and insecurity among students and families at their respective SBHC sites. Proposals were evaluated and grantees selected based on several factors, including community need and strength/quality of the proposed intervention. The resulting Learning Network for Ohio was comprised of seven SBHC provider sponsor grantees, representing 12 SBHC sites across the state. Three of the SBHC sites were located on elementary school campuses; one was located on a middle school campus; seven were located on high school campuses; and one was located on a K-12 campus. Five of the participating school-based healthcare provider sponsors were federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), one was a health system, and one was a children's hospital.



SCHOOL SETTINGS FOR SBHC SITES



All grantees implemented or strengthened existing food access screening, resource referral, and follow-up workflows. However, each grantee also developed additional interventions to address the food access needs in their communities. For example, some

grantees worked with community partners to facilitate food distribution events or powerpack programs to fill food access gaps, while others hosted cooking and nutrition classes for students and families. In addition, two grantees engaged youth through youth advisory councils (YACs) to implement food access projects in their schools.

To support the Learning Network, the Ohio Alliance hosted monthly virtual meetings. In addition to providing information or training relevant to the food access screening and referral activities of the grantees, these meetings were also an opportunity for the grantees to learn from each other, troubleshoot challenges together, and share resources. They also served as a regular touchpoint for the Ohio Alliance to learn about the experience of each grantee as they navigated project implementation, such as how they were approaching data collection, challenges and successes they were having with the intervention, and areas for development. This regular contact allowed the Ohio Alliance to better support the Learning Network and the goals of the project.

Partnership Development

To assess the needs of SBHCs participating in the Learning Network, the Ohio Alliance asked SBHCs to identify barriers, challenges, opportunities, and knowledge gaps they faced in addressing food access issues among their patients. This information was gathered initially through the RFP process and subsequently via surveys, Learning Network monthly meeting discussions, and meeting polls. The Ohio Alliance then structured the Learning Network monthly meetings to address the topics and themes identified by SBHC grantees, reaching out to state and local-level organizations and partners to provide topic/issue specific expertise and support for grantees.

The Ohio Alliance partnered with two SBHC provider sponsor grantees that had previously participated in a food insecurity learning cohort facilitated by School-Based Health Alliance and No Kid Hungry: The [HealthCare Connection](#) and [MetroHealth System](#). Throughout the Learning Network, representatives from these organizations shared learnings from their past experiences implementing food access interventions and provided current grantees with advice and guidance on how to move their food access work forward. They also supported the Ohio Alliance in responding to technical assistance requests from SBHCs in the Learning Network.

In addition, the Ohio Alliance partnered with representatives from the following statewide organizations: [Ohio Association of Foodbanks](#) (OAF) and the [Ohio Children’s Defense Fund](#) (CDF-Ohio). OAF is leading work to explore Medicaid waivers and other avenues for supporting the sustainability of food banks in the state, and acts as a connector for food access resources. CDF-Ohio spearheads policy and advocacy work to end childhood hunger, including the [Hunger-Free Schools Ohio coalition](#). Both organizations presented on Learning Network monthly meetings; connected SBHCs in the Learning Network to community level partners; shared state-level resources; and engaged the Learning Network in updates on Ohio’s food access policy landscape. The engagement of OAF and CDF-Ohio grounded SBHCs in Ohio’s broader food access policy environment and encouraged grantees to think about systems-level approaches for addressing food insecurity.

In addition to these partners, content experts from other organizations in Ohio and nationally were engaged to present on Learning Network monthly meetings. Topics and presenters were chosen based on: (1) gaps in knowledge as identified by grantees at the start of the project, (2) barriers encountered by grantees in implementing universal screening and referral processes, (3) and challenges in implementing other food access interventions. Topics and presenters included:

LEARNING NETWORK MONTHLY MEETINGS

TOPIC AND PRESENTER	CONTENT
Food insecurity screening tools OAF, Mid-Ohio Food Collective	Discussed the pros and cons of validated food insecurity screening tools and provided an overview of screening tool best practices, including the incorporation of the Hunger Vital Signs as a pediatric-validated tool for food insecurity screening
Food access policy CDF-Ohio, OAF	Provided an overview of the current landscape of food access policy in the state, including Medicaid reimbursement, WIC, SNAP, and school meals
Navigating food insecurity stigma American Academy of Pediatrics	Discussed ways to navigate and mitigate food insecurity stigma, emphasizing the importance of universal screening, and providing guidance on how to integrate food security questions into patient visits
Nutrition security Kroger Health Connect	Presented on the distinction between food security and nutrition security, and provided information on dietary requirements, as well as nutrition education and literacy tools and resources
Youth engagement and youth advisory councils (YACs) Nationwide Children’s Hospital, MetroHealth System	Presented on processes for developing YACs and member recruitment, and shared youth experiences

In addition to the partnerships described above, grantees leveraged existing partnerships or pursued new ones to support their various food access interventions. Organizations partnering with SBHCs to support their food access work included local foodbanks and food pantries, community-based

organizations specializing in nutrition education, churches, and local nonprofit organizations, such as [Crayons to Computers](#) and [Highland Youth Garden](#), that helped stock onsite food pantries or closets with school supplies, food, and hygiene items.

Lessons Learned

For other SBHA state affiliates or state-level organizations interested in establishing or supporting a statewide SBHC Food Access & Innovation Learning network, the Ohio Alliance offers the following lessons learned:



STATE AND LOCAL PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

Identify state and local-level organizations that are leading or contributing to food access work in your state and develop relationships with these organizations. These relationships can be instrumental in connecting SBHCs to food access resources and supporting SBHCs in their work to address food insecurity.



SHARED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Provide opportunities for partners to share and learn alongside sites implementing the interventions. By providing forums for shared learning, partners can better understand the needs of sites and provide support, resources, and knowledge directly to SBHCs as needs arise.



ONGOING FEEDBACK GATHERING

Have several mechanisms for collecting information on the experiences of SBHC sites. Information should be collected both at the onset of an initiative and throughout. This allows for stronger and more adaptive planning on how to structure a learning network, the partners to connect SBHCs with, and the resources/information that can be shared to support SBHCs in their work.



STATE POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Engage in conversations on food access policy at the state level. Understanding a state's food access policy landscape can inform SBHCs in their food access sustainability and expansion planning, as well as support collective impact efforts to address food insecurity at a systems level statewide.

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