

Issue 8: Student Health: A Pathway to Classroom Success

Issue Overview

For students to be successful in school, they need to be healthy. While this seems like an obvious statement, research has highlighted the direct links between student outcomes and all aspects of health – physical, vision, hearing, oral, nutritional, and mental health. For those in poverty who are at increased risk of not receiving healthcare, this can be an added challenge to achieving academic success. As Georgia works to improve educational outcomes for all students, it must consider the health of the student population.

TABLE 5.1 HEALTH STATISTICS FOR GEORGIA'S CHILDREN

KIDS COUNT HEALTH INDICATORS	GEORGIA	U.S
Low-birthweight babies	9.5%	8.1%
Children without health insurance	7%	5%
Births to women receiving late or no prenatal care	8%	6%
Children with one or more emotional, behavioral or developmental condition	17%	17%
Households that are food insecure	14.9%	13.7%

Significance for Georgia

While Georgia does have some efforts in place to address student health, benchmarks indicating aspects of the health of children in Georgia show that there are opportunities to further support these needs so that students are healthy and ready to learn. Data show that Georgia has a higher percentage than the national average of several problematic health-related indicators: low birthweight babies, children without health insurance, births to women receiving late or no prenatal care, children with developmental, emotional or behavioral disorders, and households that are food insecure. For each of these issues, poverty is a complicating and exacerbating factor.

About one in four children in Georgia are living in homes with incomes at or below the federal poverty level, and more than 60% of public school students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch—over one million children in Georgia are a part of one or both of those groups. For these students, access is the number one challenge in addressing their healthcare needs: access to insurance, access to nutritious food, and access to physical and mental healthcare are all more difficult for economically disadvantaged students.

Action Steps for Georgia

Student health is a significant factor in the ability of students to perform well in school and benefit from the instruction provided there. Expanding health supports for students is paramount for Georgia to see improved educational outcomes for all public-school students. This can be achieved in many ways, including expansion of School Based Health Centers, addressing the state’s mental health worker shortage, and expanding successful student mental health support programs like Project APEX. Student health and ensuring that students have access to quality nutrition and physical and mental health supports must be priorities for the state.