



**HEALTHY CHILDREN LEARN BETTER: PUBLIC HEALTH AND SCHOOL HEALTH NURSES  
FOSTERING A CULTURE OF HEALTH IN MARYLAND**

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Maryland school health and public health nurses (S/PHNs) have been providing essential public and school health services to their communities for decades. S/PHNs engage both the public and clinical health systems at multiple levels to link the health system to individuals in their communities in order to foster a culture of health. As the health care landscape changes and new models of care emerge, S/PHNs continue to advance the health of their communities through innovative initiatives. These initiatives have contributed to improved population health outcomes, health access, health equity, and reduced health costs.

As part of a study to enumerate and characterize Maryland's PHN workforce, S/PHN leaders were asked to provide examples of initiatives where S/PHNs are engaged in building a culture of health in Maryland. S/PHNs have remained engaged post-study and continue to implement some of the recommendations that arose from the study. This presentation will provide an update of the post-study activities and highlight a school health exemplar of how S/PHNs are fostering a culture of health by keeping children in school and ready to learn.

The school nurse (SHN) is the entry point into the health system for many students especially those in low-income and underserved populations. The SHN is well positioned to connect students, teachers, and parents to ensure the child has access to health and educational services that enhance their wellness as well as the wellness of their surrounding community.

To improve the health and education outcomes of their school-aged children, Howard County Health Department implemented telemedicine in six school-based wellness centers (SBWC). The SBWCs are staffed by a SHN and remotely by local pediatric providers and providers from the Howard County General Hospital Pediatric Emergency Department. Any child attending one of the six schools with services is eligible for this service. Those without insurance or a primary care provider are assisted with enrolling for Maryland's Children's Health Program, if they are eligible, and assisted with finding a provider.

Since the inception of the program in 2015 to March 2019, the six SBWCs have had 946 telehealth visits and enrolled 55% of the schools' population. Telehealth visits have improved the return to class rate from an estimated 75% to 98% and reduced absenteeism by 6.5%. Those with known health insurance status had a mix of medical assistance and private insurance, however insurance status of 25% of enrollees was unknown, and about 13-17% did not have primary care providers.

The telehealth initiative is fostering a culture of health by improving the quality of health care provided in the school-based wellness centers, improving access to care, improving the return to class rates and learning time, reducing barriers to care and health costs, and reducing absenteeism and missed work for parents. They estimate that this telehealth initiative has already resulted in net financial benefits of \$108,607 for the 2018-2019 school year.