

# Working with School Health Advisory Committees



## WHAT IS A SCHOOL HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SHAC)?

A school health advisory committee (SHAC) is any group that advises on school health. SHACs might go by other names, such as “school health teams” or “wellness councils.” Often based at the district level (though sometimes at the school or state levels), these committees are not part of the administrative structure and have no legal responsibilities. Typically, SHACs are set up to have subcommittees, each of which focuses on a particular aspect of school health (e.g., sexual health).

## HOW ARE SHACS USEFUL?

SHACs are a great way to make use of community expertise and develop partnerships while helping to advance efforts to improve school health. They help plan and promote these efforts and even carry out some of the work.

## WHO SERVES ON A SHAC?

SHACs carry more weight when they are diverse. Ideal members are genuinely interested in all aspects of student health, and are engaged with the community, are willing to devote time, and have some abilities that will be useful to the committee.

These people might include:

- » District staff
- » Teachers
- » Nurses
- » Counselors
- » Parents
- » Students
- » Administrators
- » Health department staff
- » Faculty from local colleges/universities
- » Faith-based leaders
- » Youth-serving community-based organizations
- » Local business owners
- » Social service agencies



## WHAT DO SHACS DO?

### **SHACs perform needs and resources assessments.**

SHACs can collect data from youth, and review data from surveys such as YRBS and student assessments. They can assess current policies and protocols; review the scope, sequence, and pacing of health education programs; and review schools' plans for improvement. They can identify and assess community services and potential partnerships. They can also examine lessons being implemented and how they vary between schools or teachers. They can find and share resources with teachers, conduct teacher observations, and review the results.

### **SHACs set priorities.**

After performing needs and resources assessments, SHACs write up their recommendations and use the results of the assessments to develop (or revise) their goals and objectives.

### **SHACs plan activities.**

SHACs can develop goals and objectives, assess the capacity for implementation, and review and adapt curricula, paying attention especially to its scope and sequence. SHACs can also plan professional development. SHACs can also draft letters to parents and pull together other supplementary materials.

### **SHACs evaluate and monitor programs.**

SHACs can review student assessment data, as well as conduct and review teacher observations. They can also interview program recipients and other stakeholders and document their stories. SHACs can also monitor the implementation of policies.

### **SHACs promote and advocate.**

SHACs can collect and share sample policies, write grants to support their efforts, and develop talking points for building and maintaining support for their work.

## Want to get a SHAC started?

### Questions to ask (and answer) before you do:

- » What is the purpose of having a SHAC? What issues do you want to address and what are your goals?
- » Is there anyone else or another group already doing this work?
- » Is your school district supportive of the idea? Check for any existing policies on SHACs or other advisory groups.
- » How are decisions about school health and wellness currently made? Will a SHAC be stepping on toes?
- » Is it feasible to start with a large SHAC that serves all aspects of health, or should you start by forming a subcommittee to work on one aspect?
- » To whom will the SHAC report?
- » Who will lead the SHAC and provide administrative support? Can your district appoint a coordinator?
- » Do you have a space to meet? Is there a budget for resources like postage / refreshments etc.?
- » What are you going to ask of members? How often will they be expected to meet? What do you need them to do? How long will their term be on the SHAC? You'll need this information when you recruit members.

## TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL SHAC MEETINGS

- » **Make it easy and fun to attend.** Have a consistent meeting schedule (e.g. the third Wednesday of the month), and send reminders. Include time for networking, and ensure every member contributes.
- » **Make meetings productive and efficient.** Have a clear agenda and circulate it ahead of time to gather additional suggestions. Start and end on time, and always end with action steps.
- » **Make people feel valued.** Ensure every member contributes, review progress so members have a sense of achievement, and celebrate successes.

## RESOURCES

### **A Coordinated School Health Approach (Florida)**

<http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/childrens-health/school-health/coordinated-school-health/index.html>

### **Promoting Healthy Youth, Schools, and Communities (Iowa)**

<http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/docs/healthy-schools/schoolhealthcouncilsguide.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

### **School Health Advisory Council Guide (Missouri)**

[http://www.healthykidsmo.org/resources/docs/SHAC/SHAC\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.healthykidsmo.org/resources/docs/SHAC/SHAC_Guide.pdf)

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