

Health Barriers to Learning

Resource Toolkit—2020 Update



BACKGROUND

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many students have missed preventive care appointments like semi-annual visits to the dentist and check-ups at the pediatrician’s office. What about students with chronic asthma, dental pain, or vision problems and the necessary appointments they may have missed? What about students whose parents have lost jobs and in-turn, insurance? Many children will now be eligible for Medicaid or PeachCare, and their families may face the complexities of navigating enrollment and different providers.

Now is the time for schools to leverage partnerships to apply a comprehensive, public-health style response to address health barriers to learning (HBLs). ***Health barriers to learning (HBLs) are prevalent and persistent health conditions that when left unrecognized or unaddressed, can interfere with a child’s ability to learn.***

PURPOSE

This toolkit was designed to provide schools with resources to support students who may have one or more HBL¹ and potential partners to connect with in the community.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

Teachers, school nurses, social workers, counselors, and other support staff.

ITEMS TO CONSIDER AS A PRECURSOR TO THIS TOOLKIT

- Collect health insurance information along with name and contact information of physician as an item in registration paperwork to determine if students have a doctor.
- Find ways to provide families with information about food access (see example in Table 2 below).

CONTENTS

- Links to sample quick “wellness check” documents for students and staff
- Research summarizing why HBLs matter
- Screening and observational tools
- Examples of follow-up actions
- Partner organizations and resources

¹ Gracy, D., Fabian, A., Roncaglione, V., Savage, K., Redlener, I. (2017). *Health Barriers to Learning: The Prevalence and Educational Consequences in Disadvantaged Children, A Review of the Literature.*

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SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

- 1) Do a quick “wellness check” for students and staff in your school. You could choose to include some or all of your students depending on the needs of your school population. Click the images below to access sample wellness checks.



- 2) Some health barriers may require follow-up after the wellness check. For example, a student who says they are having a hard time hearing should receive a hearing screen (see Table 2 below).
- 3) The tables below provide:
 - a summary of research on prevalent HBLs,
 - why they matter for learning, and
 - tools and resources to inform follow-up actions and community partnerships.

TABLE 1. RESEARCH SUMMARY

HEALTH BARRIER TO LEARNING	WHY IT MATTERS
<p>Asthma</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearly 9% of children in Georgia are estimated to have asthma – that is almost 160,000 students in K-12th grade. Consequences of poorly controlled asthma are emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and missed school. Nationally, children with asthma miss 13.8 million days of school. <p>Georgia Asthma Control Program, 2020; Gracy et al 2017</p>
<p>Oral Health</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than 50% of third grade students in Georgia have a history of tooth decay; nearly 20% are untreated and almost 3 times more likely to miss school. Students who experience dental pain are more likely to report feeling unhappy, worthless, and withdrawn, and/or overly sensitive than their peers. Dental pain can lead to trouble sleeping and eating, increased school absences, difficulty paying attention, and lower academic outcomes. <p>Kabore et al, 2014; Gracy et al 2017</p>
<p>Vision Problems</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common vision impairments affect up to 25% of students and can lead to behavioral and academic problems if they go uncorrected. About 80% of learning occurs through visual tasks such as reading and writing. <p>CDC 2006; Walker 2009, National Academy of Sciences 2016; Gracy et al 2017</p>
<p>Hearing Problems</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nationally, about 10 out of every 1,000 children will have permanent hearing loss by school age. Hearing problems significantly increase the risk of social, emotional, and behavioral problems, and the likelihood of repeating a grade. Even minimal hearing loss places children at over 4 times the risk of problems with language skills compared with their peers. <p>Gracy et al 2017; Martin et al 2006</p>
<p>Food Insecurity</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food insecurity is defined as limited or uncertain access to enough food. Before COVID-19, the food insecurity rate among children under 18 In Georgia was estimated at 20% – that is almost 350,000 students in K-12th grade. Common ways food insecurity may present in students include behavioral problems, depression, anxiety, and obesity. <p>AAP and FRAC,2017; Feeding America, 2019; Shankar et al 2017</p>

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HEALTH BARRIER TO LEARNING	WHY IT MATTERS
<p>Developmentally Appropriate Language Skills</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective use of expressive and receptive language skills is directly linked to increased student engagement and decreased aggression and other behavior problems. • Developmentally appropriate language skills have a demonstrated protective effect on students' mental health. • Students who have difficulties with language skills also struggle with the use of "inner dialogue" essential to effectively reason, regulate emotions, and cope with problems. • Language skill deficits are frequently misinterpreted and mischaracterized as inattention, opposition, and conduct problems. <p>Chow & Wehby 2019; Westrupp et al 2019; Starr et al 2019; Law et al 2017; Curtis 2018; Gooch et al 2017</p>
<p>Student Engagement and Well-Being</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The positive impact of student engagement on emotional and academic outcomes has been clearly established. • A student's ability to communicate and engage with others is significantly associated with their emotional and mental health. • According to the CDC, mental health for children and adolescents is defined as the ability to reach developmental and emotional milestones, learn and demonstrate healthy social skills, and cope with problems. • Developmental assets have a substantial positive impact on students' social, emotional, and mental health development and academic outcomes. • The framework of developmental assets conveys supports, opportunities, relationships, and personal strengths that contribute to child and adolescent emotional well-being. <p>Fredericks et al 2004; Law et al 2017; CDC 2020; Bethel et al 2019; Bleck & DeBate 2016; Roehlkepartain & Blyth 2020</p>

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TABLE 2. RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS TO ADDRESS HEALTH BARRIERS TO LEARNING

HEALTH BARRIER TO LEARNING	SCREENING AND OBSERVATIONAL TOOLS	EXAMPLE FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS	PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES
<p>Asthma</p> 	<p>Screening method:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12-item questionnaire <p>Completed by: Parents Time to complete: 5 min. Cost: Free</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure students with asthma have asthma action plans on file • Asthma-Friendly Schools Toolkit • Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Action Kit • Ronald McDonald House Charities Care Mobile (Metro Atlanta Only) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Georgia Department of Public Health (GDPH) – School Nursing Program • Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta (CHOA) • Georgia Asthma Coalition • Univ. of Alabama Birmingham asthma study
<p>Oral Health</p> 	<p>Screening method:</p> <p>American Academy of Pediatrics Oral Health Risk Assessment</p> <p>Completed by: Parent, nurse, dental hygienist, oral health professional</p> <p>Time to complete: 5 min. Cost: Free</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GDPH Oral Health Services for Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Brushing ○ Fluoride ○ Dental sealants • Contact GDPH • Mobile dental care units (e.g. Help a Child Smile) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GDPH Oral Health Services for Schools • Federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) • Georgia schools of dental hygiene • Local dentists/hygienists • Volunteer health providers • Physicians offering fluoride varnish in their practices
<p>Vision Problems</p> 	<p>Screening method/tool:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual acuity chart • SPOT Vision Screener <p>Completed by: Nurse or trained volunteer</p> <p>Time to complete: 1 min. Cost: Variable²</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a screening protocol • Have staff trained to perform screening • Establish a partnership where eligible students can receive glasses free of charge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Georgia Lion’s Lighthouse Foundation • Lions Clubs • GDPH Districts • Vision 2 Learn Georgia • Communities in Schools

² SPOT vision screener is \$7,500. Consider connecting with partners (e.g. Lions Club) or purchasing one device to share among a cluster of schools, district, or Regional Education Service Agency (RESA).

HEALTH BARRIER TO LEARNING	SCREENING AND OBSERVATIONAL TOOLS	EXAMPLE FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS	PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES
<p>Hearing Problems</p> 	<p>Screening method/tool:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audiometer • Maico ERO Scan <p>Completed by: Nurse or trained volunteer Time to complete: 2 min. Cost: Variable³</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a screening protocol • Have staff trained to perform screening • Establish a partnership where eligible students can receive hearing aids free of charge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Georgia Mobile Audiology • Georgia Lion's Lighthouse Foundation • Lions Clubs • Georgia Department of Public Health Districts
<p>Food Insecurity</p> 	<p>Screening method:</p> <p>2-item food insecurity questionnaire</p> <p>Completed by: Student Time to complete: 1 min. Cost: Free</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link eligible families to Free/Reduced Breakfast & Lunch • Offer weekend backpack programs • Create an after-school meals program (CACFP) • Establish a relationship with your local food bank 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GaDOE School Nutrition Program • Foodfinder • Georgia Food Bank Association • Share Our Strength – No Kid Hungry • Action Ministries
<p>Developmentally Appropriate Language Skills</p> 	<p>Observational tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language Skills by Age Band • Engagement Ladder <p>Completed by: Teacher Time to complete: Varies Cost: Free</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use observational tools on an on-going basis to enhance Tier 1 instructional practices. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For guidance, click here to download the “Quick Reference” tool: <i>Adjust Instructional Practices by Language Skill Level</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal Design for Learning • GaDOE L4GA • Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy

³ Maico ERO Scan is \$4,000. Consider connecting with partners (e.g. Lions Club) or purchasing one device to share among a cluster of schools, district, or RESA.

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<p>Student Engagement and Well-Being</p> 	<p>Observational tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement Ladder <p>Completed by: Teacher Time to complete: Varies Cost: Free</p> <p>Self-Reporting Tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional Well-Being Check <p>Completed by: Student Time to complete: 5 min. Cost: Free</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use observational tools on an on-going basis to enhance Tier 1 instructional practices. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For guidance, click here to download a freely accessible “Quick Reference” tool. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developmental Assets by Age Band • Georgia Insights—Whole Child Toolkit • Georgia Student Health Survey • GaDOE Safe and Supportive Schools