

Addressing Chronic Absenteeism: School Nurses Leading for Change

CSHS Session 2 – Felicity Crawford’s Slide Notes

Part 1

Structuring Poverty: How Racism Shapes Poverty, Child, and Adolescent Health A Focus on the Role of Nurses in Promoting Health Equity

Securing Children’s Well-Being

- Science-based principles of early learning
- Relationships → Reducing Stress → Building Core Skills

Poverty: A Major Source of Adversity

“It is much easier in the United States to be decently dressed than it is to be decently housed, fed, or doctored.”

- Michael Harrington, *The Other America* (1962)

Percentage of Children in Poverty

Approximately **16 percent** (or 11.4 million) of children in the U.S. live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

- Over 50 percent of these children attend U.S. public schools.
- Most are children of color.
 - Example: 23.3% Black; 22.4% Hispanic (Brookings Institute)

The Interconnectedness of Race, Class, and Health

- **Historical and Systemic Racism:**
 - The legacy of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and discriminatory housing policies
 - The ongoing impact of systemic racism on health disparities
- **The Role of Socioeconomic Status:**
 - How poverty, education, and occupation influence health outcomes
- **The Intersection of Race and Class:**
 - The compounding effects of racism and class on health disparities

Video – EQUIP Equity Essentials: Anti-Racism and Cultural Safety (5:56)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaQuna2WJmQ>

The Role of Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a significant determinant of health, encompassing factors such as income, education, and occupation.

- **Poverty:** Poverty limits access to healthy food, safe housing, and quality healthcare. It also contributes to stress, which can negatively impact physical and mental health.
- **Education:** Education is linked to better health outcomes. Higher levels of education are associated with higher incomes, healthier behaviors, and greater access to healthcare.
- **Occupation:** Occupational exposure to hazards, stress, and irregular work schedules can negatively impact health.

Video – How Early Childhood Experiences Affect Lifelong Health and Learning (5:10)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lipVaPKnjRk>

The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health

- **Chronic Stress and Toxic Stress:**

Racial discrimination and systemic racism can lead to chronic stress and toxic stress in children and adolescents. Chronic stress, a prolonged state of heightened physiological arousal, can negatively impact physical and mental health. Toxic stress, a more severe form of chronic stress, can have lasting effects on brain development, immune function, and behavior.

- **Epigenetic Modifications:** Chronic stress can trigger epigenetic modifications, such as methylation, which can alter gene expression and influence the development of diseases. For instance, studies have shown that exposure to racial discrimination can lead to increased methylation of genes involved in stress response, which can increase the risk of chronic diseases (Miller et al., 2019).

- **Health Disparities:**

Racial and ethnic minority children and adolescents experience a disproportionate burden of health disparities. These disparities are evident in:

- **Chronic Diseases:** Higher rates of chronic diseases, such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease (Williams & Sternthal, 2010).
- **Mental Health Disorders:** Increased prevalence of mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and conduct disorder (Kessler et al., 2016).
- **Substance Abuse:** High

- **Educational Attainment:**

Racial disparities in education are deeply intertwined with health disparities. Children and adolescents from marginalized racial and ethnic groups often attend under-resourced schools, receive lower-quality education, and face discrimination from teachers and peers. These factors can lead to lower academic achievement, higher dropout rates, and limited educational opportunities, which in turn can limit access to higher-paying jobs and quality healthcare.

Key mechanisms linking education and health:

- **Socioeconomic Status:** Higher levels of education are often associated with higher incomes, which can lead to better access to healthcare, nutritious food, and safe housing.
- **Health Literacy:** Education can improve health literacy, enabling individuals to understand health information, make informed decisions about their health, and adhere to medical advice.
- **Job Opportunities:** Higher levels of education often lead to better job opportunities with higher wages and better benefits, including health insurance.
- **Reduced Stress:** Education can provide individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to cope with stress and adversity, which can have a positive impact on mental and physical health.

- **Access to Healthcare:**

Marginalized communities often face significant barriers to accessing quality healthcare. These barriers can be systemic, structural, or interpersonal, and can have a profound impact on health outcomes.

Systemic Barriers:

- **Insurance Coverage:** Many marginalized communities lack health insurance or have inadequate coverage, making it difficult to afford healthcare services.
- **Geographic Access:** Lack of access to healthcare providers, especially in rural and underserved urban areas, can limit healthcare access.
- **Healthcare System Complexity:** Navigating the complex healthcare system, including understanding insurance policies, scheduling appointments, and finding specialists, can be challenging for individuals with limited health literacy.

Structural Barriers:

- **Poverty:** Poverty can limit access to healthcare due to the high cost of medical services, medications, and transportation.
- **Discrimination and Bias:** Implicit bias among healthcare providers can lead to disparities in diagnosis, treatment, and referral.
- **Language Barriers:** Language barriers can hinder communication between patients and healthcare providers, leading to misunderstandings and misdiagnoses.

Video – InBrief: The Science of Resilience (2:29)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1r8hj72bfGo>

The Intersection of Socioeconomic Status and Health Disparities

Lower socioeconomic status is often linked to poorer health outcomes, including:

- **Chronic Disease:** Individuals with lower SES are more likely to suffer from chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.
- **Infant Mortality:** Lower SES is associated with higher infant mortality rates.
- **Mental Health:** Individuals with lower SES experience higher rates of mental health disorders and are less likely to receive adequate treatment.

Video – Epigenetics (3:08)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ga4n-rGfdVY>

This is a normally occurring process that can become aberrant due to adversity.

Addressing Health Disparities Linked to Socioeconomic Status

To address health disparities linked to socioeconomic status, it is essential to:

- **Reduce Poverty:** Implement policies that reduce poverty and income inequality, such as increasing the minimum wage, expanding access to affordable housing, and strengthening social safety nets.
- **Improve Education:** Invest in early childhood education, provide access to quality K-12 education, and support higher education opportunities.
- **Expand Access to Healthcare:** Ensure affordable and accessible healthcare for all, including preventive care, mental health services, and chronic disease management.
- **Promote Healthy Behaviors:** Encourage healthy eating, physical activity, and smoking cessation through education and community-based programs.
- **Address Social Determinants of Health:** Recognize the role of social factors, such as housing, transportation, and environmental quality, in shaping health outcomes.

The Role of Nurses in Promoting Health Equity

- **Cultural Competence and Humility:**
 - Understanding the importance of cultural sensitivity and humility in healthcare

- Developing the skills to effectively communicate and care for diverse populations
- **Advocacy and Policy Change:**
 - Advocating for policies that address the root causes of health disparities
 - Supporting community-based initiatives that promote health equity
- **Building Trust and Relationships:**
 - Establishing strong relationships with patients and families from marginalized communities
 - Providing culturally competent and compassionate care

Strategies for Addressing Health Disparities

- **Early Childhood Interventions:**
 - Promoting early childhood education and development
 - Providing access to high-quality childcare and early intervention services
- **Community-Based Interventions:**
 - Collaborating with community organizations to address social determinants of health
 - Implementing community-based programs to improve health literacy and access to care
- **School-Based Interventions:**
 - Promoting mental health and wellness in schools
 - Providing nutrition education and access to healthy foods
- **Policy Advocacy:**
 - Advocating for policies that address the social determinants of health
 - Supporting initiatives that promote health equity and social justice

Conclusion

- The impact of poverty and racism on child and adolescent health are complex and serious issues.
- Nurses play a critical role in addressing health disparities and promoting health equity.
- Understanding the root causes of health disparities and implementing evidence-based interventions are key starting points for working collaboratively towards a healthier future for all children.

Part 2 – Tackling Chronic Absenteeism: A Multi-Tiered Approach

Breaking the Cycle: Addressing Chronic Absenteeism with MTSS and Policy Development

A Chutes and Ladders Approach to Positive Student Outcomes

The Problem of Chronic Absenteeism

- **Definition:** Missing 10% or more of school days, excused or unexcused.
- **Impact on Student Achievement:**
 - Lower academic performance
 - Increased risk of dropping out
 - Negative social and emotional effects
- **Root Causes:**
 - Health issues
 - Poverty and housing instability (Matthew Desmond, *Poverty by America*)
 - Family issues
 - Lack of engagement
 - Bullying and harassment

The Impact of Poverty on Absenteeism (Matthew Desmond)

- **Housing Instability:**
 - Frequent moves disrupt schooling and lead to missed days.
 - Unsafe housing conditions can contribute to health problems.
- **Financial Stress:**
 - Parents may miss work to care for sick children, leading to job loss or instability.
 - Lack of resources for transportation, school supplies, and nutritious food.
- **Mental Health Challenges:**
 - Poverty can exacerbate mental health issues, affecting both students and families.

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Framework

- **Tier 1: Universal Supports**
 - Positive school climate and culture
 - High-quality instruction
 - Effective classroom management
 - Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS)
- **Tier 2: Targeted Interventions**
 - **Small-group interventions:**
 - **Social-emotional learning groups:** Focus on building social skills, self-awareness, and emotional regulation.
 - **Academic tutoring:** Provide individualized or small-group support in core subjects.
 - **Attendance contracts:** Develop personalized attendance contracts with students and families, setting clear expectations and incentives.
 - **Mentoring programs:** Pair students with mentors who can provide support, guidance, and encouragement.
 - **Parent-teacher communication:**
 - Regular communication with families through phone calls, emails, or conferences.

- Parent-teacher conferences to discuss student progress and address concerns.
- Home visits to build relationships with families and provide support.
- **Community partnerships:**
 - Collaborate with local organizations to provide resources and support, such as food banks, clothing drives, and healthcare services.

Video – Parent Outreach Worker (4:45)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zm3_13IDVak

Role of School Nurses in Administering MTSS and Tier 2 Interventions

- **Identify students at risk** through attendance data and health screenings
- **Collaborate with families** to understand barriers to attendance and develop strategies to address them
- **Address health-related barriers** by:
 - Providing health education and screenings
 - Connecting families to community health resources
 - Advocating for access to healthcare and medications
- **Facilitate Tier 2 Interventions** by:
 - Coordinating with teachers and other staff to implement interventions
 - Monitoring student progress and adjusting interventions as needed
 - Providing health-related support for students in small-group interventions

Policy Development Process: A Chutes and Ladders Approach to Improved Attendance The Climb to Improved Attendance

1. **Identify the Problem:** *Roll the dice.* Clearly define the issue of chronic absenteeism and its impact.
 - **Potential Pitfall:** Lack of accurate data or ineffective data analysis.
2. **Form a Team:** *Climb the ladder.* Assemble a diverse team of stakeholders, including educators, parents, community members, and healthcare providers.
3. **Gather Data:** *Roll the dice.* Collect data on attendance rates, identify patterns, and analyze root causes.
 - **Potential Pitfall:** Data privacy concerns or resistance to data-driven decision-making.
4. **Develop Goals and Objectives:** *Climb the ladder.* Set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals.
5. **Create Action Plans:** *Roll the dice.* Develop strategies and interventions to address the identified issues, including:
 - **Addressing Housing Instability:** Partner with local housing authorities and social service agencies.
 - **Providing Financial Support:** Implement programs like free or reduced-price meals and school supply drives.
 - **Promoting Mental Health:** Offer mental health services and support for students and families.
6. **Implement the Plan:** *Climb the ladder.* Roll out the plan, monitor progress, and make necessary adjustments.
 - **Potential Pitfall:** Lack of adequate funding or resources.
7. **Evaluate the Impact:** *Roll the dice.* Assess the effectiveness of the policies and interventions.

- **Potential Pitfall:** Ineffective evaluation methods or failure to use data to inform future decisions.

We can navigate these challenges and celebrating successes by working together to improve student attendance and academic outcomes.

Policy Development at Salem Public Schools

1. Identify the Problem

- The mayor and other city officials adopted a multilayered approach to identify issues youth faced.

2. Form a Team

- City officials tapped into their extended networks within and outside of their city (e.g., HGSE, YMCA).
- School system connected with City Connects – a university-run program.

3. Gather Data

- Team administered surveys and interviews to understand barriers and opportunity gaps that students and their families were facing.
- Identified issues: poverty, housing instability (homelessness), family instability, food insecurity, substance use or adult mental health issues, cognitive issues, transportation, etc.

4. Develop Objectives and Goals

- Focus: disrupting inequities, developing wraparound services, ensuring every child had a team, and helping families to surmount the barriers they faced.

5. Create Action Plans

- Pair every child in the school district with a student coordinator and ensure school nurses were included at the decision-making table.

6. Implement the Plan

- All children were paired with student coordinators, who secured home/school connections.
- Additional staff were hired to work with support coordinators and school nurses.
- **The need to organizationally synthesize student support services required that school nurses become involved in the decision-making processes.**
- Because the challenges were typically beyond the scope of the school, the team also applied for grant funding and partnered with non-governmental organizations.

7. Evaluate the Impact

- **Successes:** established school culture, dedicated time for planning built into the school day, collaboration with the school and between school staff and families, plans/procedures recorded on organizational chart and online.
- **Recommendations:** create centralized expectations for how people are engaged in collaboration, write down protocols and procedures, establish a strong system of triage, use data to get buy-in from administration, and tap into both formal and informal systems of support.
- Challenges remain that require creativity and support from others to resolve.

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Framework

• Tier 3: Intensive Interventions

- Individualized interventions for students with significant needs
- Mental health counseling

- Home visits
- Alternative education programs

Conclusion

- Chronic absenteeism is a complex issue with significant consequences for student success.
- MTSS provides a comprehensive framework for addressing the diverse needs of students.
- School nurses play a critical role in implementing MTSS and improving attendance.
- By addressing the root causes of absenteeism, including poverty and housing instability, we can create more equitable and supportive learning environments.