

Strategies for Encouraging the Completion of Consent Forms

Why Consent Forms Are Important

Every school-based health program is required to collect written consent from parents/guardians/caregivers before their student may receive services. While the content of the consent form may vary depending on the agreement between the health care provider and the school district, consent forms at minimum usually provide consent for treatment or services administered by the healthcare provider, HIPAA guidelines and information sharing, and payment information.

Challenges of Collecting Completed Consent Forms

Many existing school-based health programs express challenges with collecting completed consent forms from parents. Parents may not complete consent forms for a variety of reasons, including:

- Parents may not receive the form or, if they do and complete it, the form may not be returned to the health center by the student. This challenge can be overcome by making the consent forms accessible to parents and removing barriers for parents and students to return.
- Parents may not understand the services provided by the health care provider or the benefits for their children or think that the program does not apply to their children if they already have a primary care doctor. Providing education and promoting the benefits of the school-based health program can help to overcome these challenges.
- Parents may not want their child to receive health care services at school. While describing the school-based health program and its benefits or increasing accessibility may help, this decision must be honored and respected.

Considerations for Collecting Consent Forms

Strategies for encouraging the completion of consent forms should be formulated to overcome these challenges. The collection of consent forms should be discussed between the health care provider and the school district during the planning phase so that a plan is in place to begin collecting consent forms before the health program begins providing services to students.

Always discuss outreach efforts with both health care providers and school administration to ensure appropriate permission is granted. Collaboration between these two partners is key to increasing the number of consent forms completed by families. Work with the school district's communications department to understand the best vehicles for communicating with parents and barriers to communication such as languages spoken at home. It is also important to realize that not all approaches and strategies will work in all school districts or even in all schools in a district since the culture of every student and parent population is different.

Strategies for Encouraging the Completion of Consent Forms

- In addition to the consent form, disseminate a cover sheet, brochure, or flier that describes the health care provider's services, qualifications, and benefits provided to students.
- Keep consent forms simple and limit to no more than two pages if possible. Avoid printing consent forms double sided to eliminate the potential for parents to miss signature lines.
- Include consent forms in registration packets that go out to students and families before the start of each school year. Parents may be more likely to complete while they are completing other forms.
- Include logos/letterhead for both the school and the health care provider to help convey the collaboration between the two partners.
- Host an open house or set up a table in a high-traffic area during parent/teacher nights, PTA meetings, registration days, or other events when parents visit the school. Use this opportunity to have forms available and to educate parents on the SBH program.
- Post a copy of the consent form on the school's website or parent portal. Depending on your policies and procedures, parents may be able to complete the form and submit to the healthcare provider via email or fax. This can be especially helpful if a student becomes ill during the school day and the parent would like for their child to be seen before they are picked up.
- Place copies of consent forms in common areas throughout the school such as at the front desk and in the nurse's office.
- If your school-based health program isn't always open during school hours, place a secure drop box in a common area (e.g. in front of the health center) for students and parents to drop off forms. Make sure the box locks so that forms cannot be removed once they are placed inside.
- Create an incentive for students who return their consent forms such as granting those students a "hat day" or special activity/field day, entering students into a drawing for a prize, or giving students health center swag such as a pencil or t-shirt.
- Educate school nurses, secretaries, faculty and other staff on the consent process so that they may advocate for students to return signed consent forms.
- Explore using social media and text messages with links to the online consent forms or promote in other places where families are highly connected.
- Engage teachers in both brainstorming ideas for getting consent forms back as well as in the collection process since they know their students best for getting things returned to them.
- Discuss the option of obtaining verbal consent over the phone with the school district/sponsor organization so that parents can be contacted during the school day if a child were to present as sick.
- Work with your provider organization or a group of students to develop a video that describes your program and how parents can provide consent for their students to receive services. Share the video via appropriate website and social media channels. [Here is an example from Cox's Health.](#)