

OMNSS Information Brief

Non-Academic Barriers to Learning

This information brief was developed for the Ohio Mental Health Network for School Success (OMNHSS), by the Center for School-Based Mental Health Programs (CSBMHP). A copy of the brief and an expanded report of all OMNHSS information briefs are available at www.omnhss.org

Non-Academic Barriers to Learning

Conditions in children's lives and environments must be right in order for them to be successful academically, socially, and emotionally. Non-academic barriers to learning can impede upon a student's ability to learn by not allowing them to be engaged in the classroom or to make the most of their academic learning time. Impediments to optimal school success not only affect social, emotional, and developmental growth, but also academic achievement. Non-academic barriers to learning include:

- Physical health barriers, such as hunger and poor nutrition
- Mental health barriers, such as depression and anxiety
- Exposure to violence, such as bullying and gang activity
- Abuse and neglect, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse
- Exposure to traumatic events or repeated, long-term traumatic experiences
- Family barriers, such as homelessness, domestic violence, and family conflict
- Negative peer influences, such as rule breaking and truancy
- Alcohol, tobacco, and/or drug use
- Difficulties with concentration and attention
- Behavioral barriers, such as disruptive and unruly behavior
- Social-emotional barriers, such as poor impulse-control or anger management

How Can Schools Address Non-Academic Barriers to Learning?

Research demonstrates that schools have the opportunity to enhance children's abilities to learn and grow within the school setting by:

- Providing caring support for their students and families to ensure that the students' basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, and safety are met
- Increasing each student's social and emotional skills
- Provide developmentally and culturally appropriate health and drug information to enable students to make informed decisions about healthy living
- Providing appropriate structures that set positive social norms and emphasize limit setting and consistent expectations
- Offering disruptive and unruly students an alternative academic environment where they can receive intensive interventions
- Providing nutritional meals and snacks
- Welcoming parents as part of the learning community
- Providing all students the opportunity to meaningfully participate in decisions that impact their learning environment

For more information about non-academic barriers to learning, please visit the Center for Mental Health in Schools website at smhp.psych.ucla.edu/, the Center for School Mental Health website at csmh.umaryland.edu/, the Center for School Mental Health Programs website at www.units.muohio.edu/csbmhp/ and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning website at www.casel.org.

OMHNSS Information Brief

Non-Academic Barriers to Learning, Continued...

This information brief was developed for the Ohio Mental Health Network for School Success (OMNHSS), by the Center for School-Based Mental Health Programs (CSBMHP). A copy of the brief and an expanded report of all OMHNSS information briefs are available at www.omnhss.org

Evidence-Based Programming Can Address Non-Academic Barriers:

One avenue for schools to address non-academic barriers to learning is through the implementation of an evidence-based program. Evidence-based programs are programs that have been evaluated and determined to achieve positive outcomes, such as prevention or reduction of a barrier to learning. The National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices is a searchable database of prevention and intervention strategies and can be found at

In 2004, the Ohio School Board adopted a set of nine guidelines to assist schools in addressing non-academic barriers to school success.

www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/.

Schools can implement evidence-based programs systematically by following best practice models, such as the ten-step Getting to Outcomes framework. The Getting to Outcomes framework can be downloaded at

http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR101/.

Each of these steps has been outlined in a separate informational brief designed to assist you in implementing an evidence-based program within your school setting, and can be found at the Center for School Based Mental Health Programs website at

www.units.muohio.edu/csbmhp/.

What is the State of Ohio Doing to Address Non-Academic Barriers to Learning?

In 2004, the Ohio School Board adopted a set of nine guidelines to assist schools in addressing non-academic barriers to students' success. Those guidelines, which were developed in partnership with school staff, parents, mental health professional, and legislators, include:

- Operational principles for local schools that are grounded in best practices for academic achievement and are espoused by the community produce system effectiveness
- School-community partnerships enable the provision of comprehensive services for students and staff
- Regular, thorough assessment and evaluation result in continuous improvement
- High-quality staff development and administrative support leads to effective program implementation
- Addressing real and perceived threats to safety and security enables students to focus on learning and teachers to focus on instruction
- A student's sense of "belonging" in the classroom encourages class participation, positive interactions, and good study habits
- Engagement of parents and families in school-home learning partnerships maximizes the potential for effective instruction and student learning
- Youth engagement in forming school policy and procedure integrates an essential perspective into proposed solutions
- High-quality food service supports improvements in academic performance and behavior