

# how to tips

## HOW TO WORK WITH SCHOOLS

### What is the Online Resource Center?

The purpose of the Online Resource Center is to help increase the number of eligible children who are enrolled in no- and low-cost health insurance offered through Medi-Cal, the state's Healthy Families Program or through one of the Children's Health Initiatives (CHIs) offered in 29 counties. These are children from low-income families – generally considered the working poor – who are not eligible for and do not want to go on welfare.

### Why work with schools?

It's simple. Go where the kids are. Where there are kids, there are parents or guardians. Working with teachers and other school officials is one of the best ways for cities, counties, and other agencies or organizations to reach parents of children who may be eligible for no-cost or low-cost health insurance. Parents are accustomed to receiving information from schools and generally see them as trusted places to go for help. Schools are accustomed to providing information to parents, and they have numerous outlets and opportunities to do so.

Teachers understand the importance of healthy students, and most know their students and their needs. They often know which students are ill most often and which ones may not have health insurance. Parents often trust their children's teachers and maybe more likely to respond to a form or flier sent home from the school.

### Different ways to work with schools

Depending upon your community, the interest at the school level and resources available, there are several different ways to work collaboratively with the education community to get the word out to parents about affordable health insurance so eligible children can be enrolled.

For example, it is possible to work with individual classroom teachers (using the Teachers for Healthy Kids model described on page 3) or to work with schools through other school-based programs, such as before- and after-school recreation programs held on school sites, or through pre-school or summer programs. Similarly, it is possible to collaborate with individual schools or with a district as a whole to incorporate the delivery of information about children's health insurance information into a district's or a school's existing activities or to help create new events at which the information can be shared. It is also possible to combine a school-based activity with a city or county based activity to get the word out and eligible children enrolled.

### What is Teachers for Healthy Kids (THK)?

Teachers for Healthy Kids (THK) is a project developed jointly by the California Teachers Association (CTA) and the California Association of Health Plans (CAHP), funded by The California Endowment. The project's purpose is to include teachers as part of a comprehensive school outreach team that will make health insurance outreach part of regular school/parent communication. Project health plan partners support outreach efforts through strategic planning, participation in school activities and follow-up with enrollment as needed. The intent of THK is to ensure that all children have access to high-quality and accessible health care so they come to school ready to learn.

[www.TeachersForHealthyKids.com](http://www.TeachersForHealthyKids.com)

# HOW TO WORK WITH SCHOOLS - *Key Steps to Follow*

## 1. Decide how you want to work with the school.

Does your city, county, or organization want to collaborate by working through the school's before- or after-school recreation programs or by working directly with classroom teachers? If you want to consider involving classroom teachers, follow the THK model (described in #5 below). This involves working with both the local teachers' association and the school district administration.

## 2. Contact individual schools in communities where high need is likely.

In large school districts or in a community where city and county officials have existing contacts and relationships with school staff, you may be able to contact the school directly. If there is no Teachers for Healthy Kids program and no interest from the teachers, begin with the principal. He or she is responsible for everything that occurs at a school site and will know who is best suited to work with you on the effort. The principal might direct you to work with the school nurse, if there is one on the campus. Visit [www.teachersforhealthykids.com](http://www.teachersforhealthykids.com) to see if there is a Teachers for Healthy Kids project in your area.

## 3. School events for outreach or enrollment.

Individual schools have many events and opportunities to connect with parents and get the word out about affordable health insurance for their kids. These events can be used as venues for signing children up for insurance or for alerting parents about enrollment events held at other locations, such as city community centers or county parks. Your conversations with the school administrators and teachers can help decide which events may (or may not) be appropriate. Some possible opportunities are:

- Kindergarten enrollment (this happens in late winter or spring)
- Parent back-to-school nights
- Parent-teacher organization meetings and events
- School festivals and fairs
- Community centers

## 4. Some things to keep in mind.

In planning your approach, keep these things in mind about working with schools:

- The primary mission of schools is education. Signing up families and children for health insurance, while important, is not part of their primary mission. Therefore, keep the impact of your activity on school personnel to a minimum as you decide what type of activity to pursue.
- The beginning and end of a school day are very busy. It is best to make appointments with administrators for times when children are in class. Also, the first few weeks of a school year or the last few weeks are similarly busy and should be avoided.
- Flyers and communication to parents may need to be translated into other languages. The Online Resource Center has templates for brochures and flyers that can be used. THK also has brochures and flyers that can be used. Check with the school about the major languages spoken in the homes of their students. You may also want to have translators at any event you are conducting.
- If the school site offers to help host an event, make sure that details such as signage, seating, parking, materials, restroom availability, clean-up and security are agreed upon prior to the event. You may need to work with the school on providing food or child care for the families.
- Involve the teachers and the school administration in planning your project. Keep an open mind and be flexible — teachers and school administrators may not think a certain activity or event will work well in their school or community. Ask for suggestions, and be prepared to find alternatives that are acceptable to everyone involved.
- Plan a meeting that includes the teachers' association president, the district or school administrators, school board members, and anyone else interested in working on the project. It is important to involve the local health plans and/or CHIs early in the planning process, so they should be included in your planning committee. Develop a timeline, assign tasks to different participants and get everyone's input on the project steps — some districts may want to do it differently to best fit their needs and expectations.

- Take into account the Medi-Cal Administrative Activities (MAA) program that covers outreach activities in schools with a 50 percent reimbursement of costs. (See #11 on page 4 for a description of MAA.)

## 5. Working with Teachers for Healthy Kids.

Teachers for Healthy Kids (THK) staff are available to help make the necessary connections with teachers in your community.

Key steps to working with Teachers for Healthy Kids include:

- Find out if your district is already involved with a THK project. A list of Districts is available on the THK website, [www.TeachersForHealthyKids.com](http://www.TeachersForHealthyKids.com). Remember, even if a district is included, not all school sites may have been involved in the THK activity.
- Ask THK to find out if the local teachers' association wants to collaborate with your city or county to reach out and enroll kids in affordable health insurance. Some teachers' associations may not be able to collaborate due to a variety of factors; if this is the case in your community, consider a project that does not involve classroom teachers but utilizes some of the other outreach methods available in schools.
- Be sure to get approval for a collaborative project from the school principal and/or district superintendent. Since most city and county officials have working relationships with the school district, this contact is best accomplished by them initially.
- Familiarize yourselves with the THK model. THK assists in the program development in the following ways:
  - Meets with the teachers at a regularly scheduled staff meeting to give them information about the availability of low-cost or no-cost health insurance.
  - Provides a health insurance survey to teachers to distribute and collect from students in targeted schools.
  - Uses the survey results to invite interested families to an enrollment event at a school. (This is an area where other groups might partner in outreach or enrollment activities that might be held at a city or county park or community center.)
  - Provides the survey results to local health insurance plans, Children's Health Initiatives (CHIs) or other local Certified Application Assistants (CAAs) so they can follow up with interested families and provide more information and enrollment assistance.

- Holds a parents' night for families who are enrolled to help them learn how to use the health insurance plan and to inform them of benefits. This is another area where community partners could be involved.

## 6. Involve the health insurance providers in your area.

Be sure to involve the health insurance providers in your area in planning and executing your activity. It is helpful to include them as you pick a date (or dates) for the outreach event. It is important to communicate early with the health insurance providers so that your potential date does not conflict with another event at which they are committed to participate.

If you are in one of the 29 counties that have a Children's Health Initiative (CHI), be sure to include them in the project. CHIs offer affordable health insurance to children who do not qualify for Medi-Cal or Healthy Families Program.

Remember, state regulations require you to invite all the health, dental and vision plans that serve your community, even though some may decline to participate.

For more information about how to work with health insurance providers, please see "How to Work with Health Plans and CHIs" on the CHK website at [www.ca-ilg.org/onlineresourcecenter](http://www.ca-ilg.org/onlineresourcecenter) in the Templates and Resources section.





## 7. Publicize the event in advance.

If your projects involve an enrollment event, be sure to publicize it in advance. Consider using posters that can be displayed at games, classes, faith-based centers or meetings prior to the event. You can hand out flyers to the kids to take home to their parents or ask a staff person to stand in the parking lot and distribute flyers to parents when they come to pick up their kids. (Be sure to get the school's permission to do this.) Schools typically have some form of newsletter that goes home to parents and usually will allow you to include information about your event. The key is to find a good way to alert parents that the enrollment event will be happening so they can plan to attend. The information provided to parents includes guidelines on eligibility and what to bring to start the enrollment process. Sample fliers and brochures are available on the Online Resource Center at [www.ca-ilg.org/onlineresourcecenter](http://www.ca-ilg.org/onlineresourcecenter) in the Resources and Tools section.

## 8. Who does the enrolling? When?

The health plans and the CHIs will provide staff who are Certified Application Assistants (CAAs) and are qualified to help families through the enrollment process. Enrollment can be completed at the event, *if* the families know in advance and bring the necessary documentation. When planning the event, make sure the health plans and CHIs will have adequate staff participating to handle potential enrollees. Arrangements should be made in advance with the school about how the ongoing enrollment will occur. Encourage the CAAs to enroll families using the online application. Again, be sure to keep the impact on school staff to a minimum.

## 10. What are Medi-Cal Administrative Activities (MAA)?

Medi-Cal Administrative Activities (MAA) is a program that reimburses schools, county agencies, and community-based organizations for 50 percent of costs associated with the time staff spend giving out information about Medi-Cal/Healthy Families and their covered benefits, and for time spent assisting people to apply for these programs. MAA is a set of activities approved by the federal Medicaid agency (the Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services — CMS) that assists the State Medi-Cal program to carry out its “administrative functions” more efficiently.

Many school districts across the state are already participating in MAA. If so, they have an agreement with a Local Education Consortium (LEC) or Local Governmental Agency (LGA) that submits claims for reimbursement on their behalf and provides oversight of the claims process. Once a district has an agreement to participate in MAA, a coordinator identifies district employees who are likely to perform MAA activities.

In a typical MAA program, school staff who are responsible for responding to students' health-related needs become the core group of MAA participants. School nurses, health aides, speech therapists and psychologists almost always participate. In some districts, school principals, assistant principals, counselors, and support staff may also participate if the school site is engaged in outreach efforts such as informing parents of the availability of no- or low-cost health, dental or vision coverage, or has a disproportionate number of children whose circumstances increase their risk of poor health outcomes. Teachers may or may not participate in MAA, depending on the approach taken by a district.