



Tips for School Nurses: Supporting ELLs

School nurses play a vital role in helping students stay healthy and safe. There are several steps that school nurses can take so that English language learners (ELLs) and ELL families are included in health-related outreach and support. Here are some ideas!

1. Tell families how to find the school nurse and/or school clinic.

Families may not be familiar with the health services that a school offers. Ensure that families know how to find the school clinic or nurse's office. If possible, include these places on tours and describe some of the services offered through the school.

2. Explain how families can share information with the school nurse.

Make sure that families know how to contact the school nurse with questions and how to share important health information, such as students' allergies or medical conditions.

3. Help make students and families feel welcome.

Get to know students and consider posting and using welcoming items in the nurse's office or clinic, such as:

- Signs in students' languages
- Diversity in visuals and posters
- Items or visuals meant to be calming or comforting, such as plants or stickers

4. Look for ways to make health services culturally responsive.

Strengthen family partnerships by welcoming families' cultures and implementing culturally responsive practice. This may relate to topics such as whether families prefer group-oriented events, gender roles, or specific traditions. It is also critical to show respect for families' beliefs related to health, wellness, and medicine, even if they are different than your own. Nurses can learn more through training from family liaisons or community partners.

5. Connect families with additional support or resources.

School nurses can be a valuable contact for the family and can connect families with services or resources related to health, mental health, food, child care, and other basic needs. These relationships are particularly valuable in a health-related emergency or public health crisis.

For example, Wolfe Street Academy in Baltimore, MD partnered with a local dental school so that dental students could provide free screenings for families, reducing the number of dental emergencies among students.





6. Ensure that families have information in their languages.

Families have a legal right to information from their child's school in their primary language. School nurses should also be familiar with their school's language access options, such as:

- Working with an interpreter or language line
- Translation services for written notices or forms
- Translation apps for texts (where appropriate)

If appropriate language access is not being offered, bring this matter to the attention of a supervisor or administrator immediately. Keep in mind that ELL specialists may have information on language access. Students should **never** be used as interpreters.

Note: If you are a bilingual nurse, or work with a bilingual nurse, talk with a supervisor about establishing guidelines for communication with families so that bilingual staff are not being pulled from other duties to interpret or translate for other staff members.

7. Educate families about their right to interpreters in other settings.

Families also have a right to access language support in other medical settings. Ensure families understand these rights and how to request that support.

8. Keep in mind the impact of immigration status.

Families' access to health and dental care may be impacted by their immigration status. Look for ways to connect families with free or low-cost medical care in the community if needed.

9. Collaborate with colleagues who partner closely with families.

There may be staff members who have close family partnerships, such as family liaisons, ELL educators, bilingual educators, interpreters, social workers, or counselors. They will have valuable insights and contacts. Look for opportunities to partner and share your work as well.

10. Build connections with the community.

Look for ways to build community partnerships, such as with local clinics, organizations, or institutions of higher education. In addition, tap into family networks! For example of what this looks like in practice, see the following:

- [Wolfe Street: How a Community School Supports ELLs](#)
- [What Multilingual Health Services and Support Look Like in Brockton, MA](#)

Recommended Resources

See this article and related videos online: <https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/school-nurse-ell>

