VERMONT Consultation & Psychiatry Access PROGRAM

Supporting Pediatric and Perinatal Providers

PRIMARY CARE PROVIDERS GUIDE

WORKING WITH SCHOOLS

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From asthma care to anxiety, **school teams and PCPs are ideal partners** in supporting children with physical and mental health conditions that affect their ability to attend, engage, and succeed in school. Children spend a significant portion of their lives at school, making effective communication and coordination with school-based providers an important part of timely, comprehensive care.

TIPS FOR COLLABORATING WITH SCHOOL-BASED PARTNERS

- **Releases: Proactively obtain caregiver consent** and any necessary releases to communicate and coordinate with school-based providers.
- **Communication: Establish a clear point of contact, email address, or phone number** that school partners can use to communicate efficiently with your practice about shared patients. **Tip:** *Navigating a clinic's general phone system can be time-consuming for school providers and may create barriers to effective collaboration. Providing a direct phone number or email address can make it easier for school and primary care teams to coordinate care.*
- The configuration of school teams varies from school to school; **ask questions to clarify** who the case manager or point-person is for a child at their school. Typical roles on a child's school team may include:

CLASSROOM TEACHER	BUILDING ADMINISTRATOR	OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST
SCHOOL NURSE	SCHOOL COUNSELOR OR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR	SPECIAL EDUCATOR
SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER	SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST	SPEECH & LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST

- **School teams as a source of collateral information**. School professionals see children across academic, social, and behavioral settings and can provide valuable information about current functioning, patterns over time, and changes in behavior. When questions arise about a child, consider reaching out to the school team for their observations and perspective.
- **Participate in team meetings when possible**. School teams understand that PCPs cannot always attend meetings. When you are unavailable, consider sending another member of the practice—such as a nurse or care coordinator—or providing written input, questions, or recommendations to a key member of the school team.

- **Coordinate screening and assessment**. Ask what screening or assessment tools the school has already completed or routinely uses. Sharing relevant results, with appropriate consent, can reduce unnecessary duplication for children and families and provide a more complete clinical picture.
- **Know your local school resources**. Familiarize yourself with your school district's Local Wellness Policy, which may identify opportunities for collaboration related to student health and wellness.
- **Build relationships before a concern arises**. If your practice primarily serves one or a few schools, consider inviting a school nurse, social worker, counselor, or other school professional to a practice meeting. Establishing relationships and preferred communication methods in advance can make coordination easier when concerns arise. Practices and schools with many shared students may also benefit from a standing care coordination meeting.
- **You don't need to wait for a formal meeting**. If you have questions or concerns about a patient, you can request a team meeting at any time; you do not need to wait for a Coordinated Services Plan (CSP)/Act 264 Meeting. VTCPAP also offers a **Guide to Act 264 Meetings for PCPs**.
- **Ask what supports are available**. Schools work hard to meet students' needs within available resources. If you believe a patient could benefit from a particular support—such as school-based counseling, movement breaks, sensory supports, or social skills interventions—connect with the school team to discuss the child's needs and what options are available. Some services may have specific eligibility requirements or be connected to an IEP or other individualized plan.
- **Coordinate before recommending an IEP or 504 Plan**. PCPs can provide valuable documentation about a child's diagnosis, health needs, and functional limitations. However, it is generally more helpful to **coordinate with the school team rather than write a letter prescribing a specific educational plan or service**. IEPs and 504 Plans have distinct eligibility criteria and legally defined evaluation processes, and a PCP recommendation does not automatically result in eligibility. Collaboration can help families receive clear, consistent information and support a strong partnership between healthcare and school teams.

UNDERSTANDING IEPS, 504 PLANS, AND EST PLANS

These supports serve different purposes and have different eligibility criteria and processes:

- **Individualized Education Program (IEP):** An IEP is developed for an eligible student with a disability who requires specialized instruction and related services to access and make progress in their education. Eligibility is determined through a formal special education evaluation process.
- **504 Plan:** A 504 Plan provides **accommodations and supports** that allow an eligible student with a disability to access their education. Unlike an IEP, it does not require that the student need specialized instruction.
- **Educational Support Team (EST) Plan:** Educational Support Teams help identify and coordinate additional supports for students experiencing academic, attendance, or behavioral challenges. Plans may include targeted interventions with progress monitored over time.

For additional information about special education services and processes in Vermont,

visit the Vermont Agency of Education.

RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES AND PROVIDERS

Vermont Family Network (VFN) provides free information, support, and guidance to families navigating questions related to their child's health, development, and education, including special education and Section 504. VFN can also connect families with advocates and others with lived experience. Visit Vermont Family Network.

ADDITIONAL VERMONT RESOURCES INCLUDE:

- Vermont Agency of Education
- Vermont Assistive Technology Program
- Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

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Vermont Program for Quality in Health Care, Inc.

*This project is supported by the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** (CMS) of the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling $1,324,117.02 with 91.80% funded by CMS/HHS ($1,215,585.48) and 8.20% funded by **Four Pines Fund** ($108,532.54) a non-government source. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CMS/HHS, or the U.S. Government.*