

School Health Advisory Council

PALM BEACH COUNTY

Johanna Albrecht, M.D.
Chair

Seth Bernstein, Psy.D.
Vice-Chair

A School Health Advisory Committee (SHAC) for each school district was established in the Florida School Health Services Act of 1973. The legislative intent was to involve parents and communities in the health and education of children by providing a means for their input in planning and evaluation of local school health programs. A SHAC is composed of interested parents, school, health, business, and community leaders who serve as problem-solvers and advisors to school districts on health-related issues.

The SHAC in Palm Beach County uses a model for reviewing school health programs recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Known as *The Coordinated School Health Model*, this approach focuses on eight component areas including (1) health education, (2) physical education, (3) nutrition, (4) school health services, (5) guidance, psychological, and social services, (6) healthy school environment, (7) staff wellness, and (8) family and community involvement. The components, when looked at in a coordinated manner, have been found to be highly effective in addressing the health risk behaviors that contribute significantly to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth.

The SHAC serves as an active voice for improving the health of school children through advocacy and support for quality, coordinated health services and education programs and policies. Over the decades, the SHAC in Palm Beach County has played an important role in many issues crucial to student health and welfare. In the 1990s, SHAC focused emphasis on health education and school nurse services. It was a strong proponent of a nurse in every public school that was achieved in 1997 when the Health Care District PBC made the commitment to provide funding and joined the local school district and health department as a partner in the school health program.

For many years, the SHAC's goals have been oriented to support efforts focused on nutrition, physical education and health education and included school board workshops on those topics. The focus shifted to addressing the needs of students with behavioral and mental health concerns when the board workshop, "*What Matters Most...Health (in this case, mental health)*" was presented on October 10, 2012. An important outcome of this workshop was the revision of school district policy/ procedures and comprehensive district-wide training regarding students and use of the Baker Act.

The SHAC has a strong history of conducting independent surveys of students, parents, and staff on issues derived from components of the *Coordinated School Health Model* that are designed to provide information on student health issues necessary to support improved provision of services. Recent surveys have focused on behavioral health concerns of elementary students. The survey results were an important source of data supporting the October 2012 school board workshop.

Parents and civic-minded persons with a passion for children's health and supporting academic success are urged to consider participation on the SHAC. The Council meets monthly during the school year with educational presentations and discussions on a wide range of important school health topics. Please call the number below for more information and join us.