

Culture of Health

Collaborating Across Sectors to Grow Healthy Kids

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Schools are usually considered to be part of a system separate from the health care system, but they play an important role in building a Culture of Health. See how cross-sector collaborations can ensure children strong starts to healthy, productive lives.

At Cincinnati's Oyler School, I watched as a third-grader received a free eye exam and then pored over the selection of eyeglasses, trying on several pairs, eventually settling on a pair of funky blue frames. He shared that he was looking forward to receiving his glasses, which he'd be

able to take home for free the following week. The student's teacher had noticed that he was having trouble seeing the board in their classroom and was empowered to do something about it. By forging partnerships with nonprofits and government agencies, Oyler has created a vision center, health clinic and dental clinic—all within the school.

Oyler has undergone a transformation over the last decade—from a school plagued by increasing poverty and declining enrollment to a school that is boosting graduation rates and helping improve the surrounding community. Oyler ensures students and their families have access to healthy meals by providing kids breakfast, lunch and dinner and sending them home with food on the weekends. It is [part of a movement](#) to create "community schools" that address kids' health needs and get them access to resources that allow them to succeed in the classroom and for years to come.

At the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, we are collaborating with others working to build a culture that values health—promoting, sustaining and safeguarding it—everywhere, for everyone. And schools are central to building this [Culture of Health](#). Second only to children's families, schools shape children's futures. We've seen the research—promoting social and emotional skills, increasing access to pre-school education, providing access to healthy foods and activities, and forging public-private partnerships to bring services into schools all help children thrive. Oyler is one of many schools across the country that is putting research-driven ideas into action. We need more like it.

Cross-sector collaboration—like the partnerships we're seeing at Oyler—will be crucial to tackling the health and educational challenges that face our students and our schools. Schools also play a critical role in detecting and mitigating the effects of childhood trauma and improving access to nutritious foods and physical activity.