



GOP Threats to Medicaid in Schools

School-based Medicaid programs support students and educators

Financing student health services can be difficult for school districts faced with ever-tightening budgets. State Medicaid programs—and federal contributions to Medicaid, which cover at least half of spending—have been instrumental in ensuring consistent financing. Since 1988, Medicaid dollars in schools have supported:

- **Equipment**, including wheelchairs, lifts and therapeutic bicycles;
- **High-quality physical and mental health services** such as targeted case management, health education, cognitive behavioral therapy, catheterization, audiology and physical therapy;
- **Medical transportation** for select students with individual education programs;
- **Program administration**, which can include helping eligible families enroll and even translations for diverse populations; and
- **Salaries** for health professionals, such as speech pathologists, occupational therapists and school nurses.

Kids in Medicaid see health and education benefits. In an average year, just 1 percent of Medicaid spending supports an estimated 5 million students. Timely access to student health services helps schools address key conditions for learning, ultimately maximizing instructional time and better preparing students to learn. In the long-term, Medicaid has also been linked to:

- Reduced high school dropouts and increased college completion;
- Reduced rates of risky sexual activity;
- Reduced substance abuse; and
- Reduced body mass index, an indicator of obesity.

Daily and over the trajectory of eligible students' lives, Medicaid in schools directly supports [AFT members' top priorities in children's health](#): mental health promotion and improved access to care.

Republican plans to dramatically change Medicaid would hurt kids and schools.

Republican politicians at the national level—including President Donald Trump, Rep. Tom Price (the nominee for secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services) and members of Congress—have all expressed their intention to dramatically change Medicaid. They don't all agree on the final design, but their proposals have a lot in common.

Overall, Republican plans would:

- Force states to ration care among low-income beneficiaries, who are primarily children, people with disabilities and the elderly;
- Increase health inequity, emergency hospitalizations and chronic disease; and
- Reduce federal financial participation in Medicaid and therefore access to healthcare.

Under GOP plans, school districts that rely on Medicaid would face:

- **Aging infrastructure and fewer supplies**, as districts struggle to replace and update outdated equipment such as weighted vests and changing tables;
- **Cuts to general education budgets** as districts move funds to cover mandated special education services;
- **Fewer services and reduced access to healthcare** for students in need, especially in rural and urban areas;
- **Higher taxes** as state and local municipalities try to make up for reduced federal funds;
- **Increased behavioral health challenges**. The majority of children who receive mental health services get them at school. Cuts to Medicaid would further isolate children from help for mental illness and emotional disturbance. As a result, more social-emotional and behavioral challenges would likely be pushed into other areas of the building, such as classrooms; and
- **Job loss** among specialized instructional support personnel, such as school psychologists and social workers, and pressure for districts to hire less qualified providers.