

Division of Specialized Care for Children

Access to Quality Education as a Social Determinant of Health for Children and Youth with Special Healthcare Needs

Access to quality education is the building block for success for all children and their futures. [*Healthy People 2030*](#) notes that “people with higher levels of education are more likely to be healthier and live longer.”

Quality education can give people access to jobs so they are able to support themselves financially and lead healthier and longer lives.

Education access and quality as a [*SDoH*](#) includes the multiple aspects of education, including:

- Consistent, full-day attendance
- The ability to stay in school until graduation
- The ability to meet knowledge milestones in reading and math

Children and Youth with Special Healthcare Needs and Access to Quality Education

Children and youth with special healthcare needs (CYSHCN) may face more difficulties in accessing quality education compared to their peers. CYSHCN have increased behavioral or physical health conditions that impact their education success. They may also:

- Be more likely to struggle with math and reading and less likely to graduate from high school
- Need more individual attention and smaller class sizes
- Attend school irregularly due to illness, medical appointments or other needs

These struggles exist because schools may not have enough resources to accommodate CYSHCN and their individual needs. These needs include:

- Training of staff
- School health services
- Adaptive equipment or technology
- Specific arrangements for transportation
- Additional specialized staff including nurses, therapists (OT/PT/ST), supplementary aides, psychological services, therapeutic recreation and counseling



So how are CYSHCN experiencing their school life? These answers come from the National Survey on Children's Health from 2020-21:

Compared to their peers without special healthcare needs, CYSHCN are:	Nine times more likely to miss school due to an illness or injury
	Four times more likely to have repeated a grade since kindergarten
	More likely to have parents say that their child is unsafe at school and that their child's school lacks appropriate emergency preparedness
	Two times more likely to be bullied at school
	Two times less likely to have parents who are confident that their child is ready for school

All children should have access to quality education. This can mean having an interdisciplinary team to cover medical, social, and educational needs at school as well as working closely with the child's families to address individual concerns.

Opportunities

- Increase the availability and capacity of special education and Early Intervention plans in Illinois for all children.
- Develop *collaborative plans* with families of CYSHCN and health/medical providers as early as possible to prepare children for school.
- Collaborate with providers to create and/or expand health and medical services available for children in schools.
- Continue to promote inclusion for CYSHCN in schools by upholding legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Create and/or expand extracurricular activities (arts, athletics, social) in schools that include CYSHCN.

The Role of UIC's Division of Specialized Care for Children

Parents and caregivers of CYSHCN should have a strong support system.

DSCC is a statewide program that partners with Illinois families and communities to help CYSHCN connect to the services and resources necessary to reach their full potential. DSCC guides families through their child's journey with a medical condition and works with doctors, schools and community groups to create a seamless support system. Our staff works together with families to develop a plan of care that addresses a child's medical, social, behavioral, educational and financial needs. This process is called care coordination. It is free for all children with eligible medical conditions, regardless of their family's income level.

Find out more about the Division of Specialized Care for Children's programs and who we help on our website at dsc.uic.edu. You can also contact us at dsc@uic.edu or (800) 322-3722.