

## *Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools*

### Key Partnerships Drive School Asthma Initiatives

#### Problem Overview

Asthma is a leading cause of school absence. More than 11,000 of the 132,000 students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) have asthma. CMS students with asthma miss an average of 9 days of school each year, compared to an average of 6 days missed for students without asthma.

#### Program/Activity Description

Since 2003, CMS has used CDC funding and guidance to set up the Asthma Education Program (AEP)—a collaborative initiative conducted with the Mecklenburg County Health Department. The AEP has focused on

- Case management supplied by school nurses for selected students with asthma.
- A school-based service providing respiratory therapists to help care for students.
- The *Open Airways for Schools* curriculum for all students with asthma in grades 3–5.
- Staff training and education about asthma.

In 2007 AEP developed and piloted the *Asthma on Wheels* (AOW) program—a curriculum for students in grades 4 and 6. Based on results from program evaluations, more in-depth asthma education for AOW instructors and asthma program staff was conducted, and CMS more effectively marketed the district's policy allowing students to carry and self-administer their asthma medications.

During the 2009–2010 school year, the AEP also

- Partnered with the CMS Health and Physical Education Department to raise asthma awareness among physical education teachers and after-school program staff.
- Enhanced the AOW staff training program by incorporating the American Lung Association's Asthma 101 training curriculum.

#### Program/Activity Outcomes

Results of the CDC's School Health Profiles survey show that between 2008 and 2010, the percentage of CMS schools

- Requiring all staff to receive annual training on recognizing and responding to severe asthma symptoms increased from 75% to 94%.
- Providing parents and families of students with asthma information to increase their knowledge about asthma increased from 36% to 44%.

The number of schools reached by the CMS AEP also has increased significantly—from 34 schools in 2004 to 178 schools in 2010. According to CMS school nurses, students with asthma are reporting improvements in attendance, academic performance, and overall quality of life.