

# Elementary School Asthma Program in the Albuquerque Public Schools

### Initiative Description

To address the needs of children with asthma, Albuquerque Public Schools established an asthma program in 2003. By 2006, all 84 elementary schools were participating in the asthma program. Components of the program included

- An Asthma Advisory Committee.
- Hiring an asthma resource nurse and an asthma lead nurse.
- Standardizing the procedures for managing and documenting students with asthma.
- Providing the Open Airways curriculum for students with asthma.
- Identifying students without health insurance.
- Helping students obtain access to health care.

### Evaluation

Data were collected using paper-and-pencil questionnaires from 120 middle school students and through conversations with 40 students and 10 parents about the asthma management program in elementary school and the students' current asthma symptoms and needs for support.

### Findings

Evaluation results revealed

- Elementary school students were more confident about how to manage their asthma after participating in the Open Airways curriculum than they were before they participated in the curriculum.
- Middle school students continued to be more confident about how to manage their asthma than they were before participating in Open Airways curriculum in elementary school.
- Middle school students were more confident about what to do after asthma symptoms had started than they were about how to anticipate or prevent an asthma episode.
- Some middle school students continued to have asthma management difficulties: 15% stayed overnight in a hospital because of their asthma and 11% awakened at night three or more times in the past month due to their asthma.

### Implications

As a result of this evaluation, Albuquerque Public School System is developing asthma-related services aimed at maintaining knowledge and skills of middle school students and increasing tobacco cessation programs for students and their families. Many other schools in the United States have asthma programs that are focused on the needs of elementary school students and may benefit from assessing the needs of their middle school students and developing additional services when needed.

### *The Public Health Problem*

Asthma is a serious problem for our nation's children.

- More than 5 million school-aged youth have asthma.
- Asthma is the leading cause of school absences resulting from a chronic illness, accounting for almost 8 days of missed school for each student with asthma, and more hospitalizations than any other childhood disease.
- The death rate for children younger than 19 years of age has increased by nearly 80% since 1980.



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