



# School nurses play vital role in student health, learning

## Ohio Association of School Nurses

**M**edically fragile children are attending school in higher numbers than ever before. Research has shown that an estimated 18% of students have a chronic health condition.

Among the chronic health conditions researchers cite are:

- The number of students diagnosed with diabetes has nearly doubled in the past 10 years, with 23% of students having pre-diabetes or Type I or Type II diabetes.
- The prevalence of food allergies among children

under the age of 18 has increased 18%. It is estimated 19% of all children have a food allergy; 40% of them have had a severe reaction requiring emergency medications.

- Asthma affects more than 10 million children in the U.S. In Ohio, approximately 419,000 children have been diagnosed with asthma.
- Epilepsy affects more than 326,000 schoolchildren through age 15, and 30% of these children cannot be adequately treated.
- Obesity rates have tripled in school-aged children; 32% of students are considered overweight or obese, affecting their physical and mental health.
- One in five children and adolescents has a diagnosable mental health disorder in the course of a year. It is estimated 20% of students may have an undiagnosed mental health disorder that could cause difficulty with academic work. It is reported that school nurses spend 32% of their time providing mental health care to their students.

## A Day in the Life of Your School Nurse



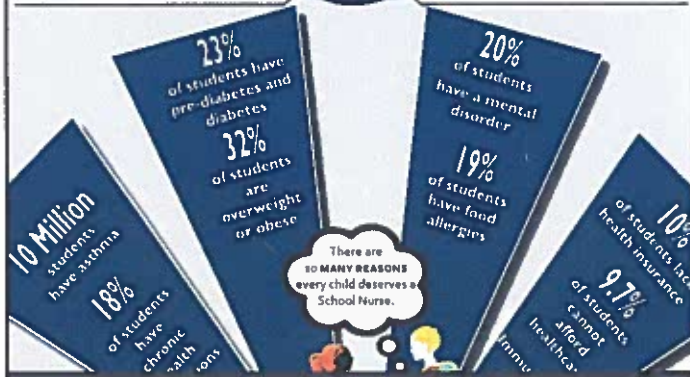
20 minutes saved per day for the Teacher by the School Nurse

60 minutes saved per day for the Principal by the School Nurse

32% of time is spent by the School Nurse providing mental health services



45 minutes saved per day for the School Clerical Staff by the School Nurse



*With graduate-level training in nursing and education, Ohio's school nurses play an important role in students' academic success.*

Even with the increasing numbers of students with health conditions, only 39% of Ohio's schools have a full-time registered nurse who provides health services to students. Ohio school nurses have reported having a caseload of more than 2,000 students in multiple buildings. The national recommendation for caseload for one school nurse is 750 for the general population, 225 for student populations that require daily school nursing services or interventions, and 125 for students with complex health care needs.

School nursing is a specialty practice of nursing that combines expertise in nursing and education. In Ohio, a school nurse is a registered nurse (RN) with a bachelor's degree and licensure from the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). The school nurse licensure requires specific graduate-level coursework in the practice of school nursing and education, including: advanced physical and mental health assessment; emergency preparedness; school law and its impact on health care; and special education regulations.



*Hundreds of school nurses gathered in Dublin in February for the 42nd annual Ohio Association of School Nurses state conference. Workshop topics ranged from student fitness, nutrition and diabetes care to mental health, safety, seizures and more.*

Because of this unique background of specialized knowledge, school nurses play an important role in promoting academic success. Besides the public perception of school nurses caring for ill and injured students and conducting health screenings, school nurses write Individualized Health Plans (IHPs) and Emergency Action Programs, and are vital in the federal Section 504 process for students who are medically fragile or have chronic health conditions. School nurses also contribute to Individual Assessment Teams (IATs), Evaluation Team Reports, Multi-factored Evaluations and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for students with medical needs that affect their learning. They also make recommendations for home tutoring. The ability to develop these plans is what sets school nurses apart from other nurses who do not have the school nurse license.

School nurses influence attendance, which impacts student achievement and graduation rates. Repeated studies have identified school nurses as playing an integral part in reducing absenteeism, and shown that a higher nurse-to-student ratio is positively correlated with increased attendance. In a study done in a large urban school district in Ohio, it was found that 57% fewer students left school early when seen by a school nurse, compared to those who were not.

School nurses are essential in promoting public health and wellness and preventing injury. Ohio has one of the lowest immunization rates in the U.S., and the presence of school nurses has been shown to increase those rates. Studies

indicate that parents are significantly less likely to request an exemption from immunizations from a school nurse than from other school personnel.

Thanks to their public health background, school nurses can recognize epidemiological patterns of symptoms, their significance and implications, and are able to develop a plan of intervention for the school community. It was a school nurse who first identified the H1N1 flu outbreak, based on an increase in illness in her school.

*Studies have shown school nurses play an integral part in reducing absenteeism, and that a higher nurse-to-student ratio is positively correlated with increased attendance.*

School nurses also are case managers. They coordinate care among health care providers, families and schools to support the health of students. They are instrumental in connecting students and families to health insurance resources, and comprehensive medical and dental services.

School nurses save time and money for public school



boards. According to several studies, the school nurse saves a teacher 20 minutes per day, the principal 60 minutes per day and school clerical staff 45 minutes per day by caring for student health concerns. This allows these critical staff members to be more productive in their teaching and leadership roles. An article published in the May 19, 2014, issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association Pediatrics* titled “Cost-Benefit Study of School Nursing Services” showed that every dollar invested in school nursing services saves \$2.20 by averting medical costs and lost work for parents, as well as increasing teachers’ productivity.

There is sometimes confusion among non-nursing professionals as to the definition of a nurse or school nurse. Nursing practice is regulated by the Ohio Board of Nursing and in accordance with the Ohio Revised Code (RC). School nurse is a title that can only be used by a registered nurse who holds a school nurse license from ODE. That means others — such as licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and unlicensed assistive personnel (UAPs) — are not qualified to be school nurses and must work under the supervision of higher-level health professionals in a school setting.

According to RC 4723.01, LPNs must practice nursing at the direction of a licensed physician, dentist, podiatrist, optometrist, chiropractor or RN. Licensed practical nurses have limited education and training in children’s health care, sometimes as little as six hours of clinical experience. They cannot practice independently, cannot assess health status and cannot create or change a plan of health care. Therefore, they must work under the supervision of a doctor or RN in a school.

UAPs have no required education or training in student health care and cannot provide health care without supervision by an RN. Recently, some districts have hired RNs as school nurses who are not licensed by ODE as well as LPNs or UAPs.

According to the Nurse Practice Act, RC 4723.03, “No person shall engage in the practice of nursing as a registered nurse, represent the person as being a registered nurse or use the title ‘registered nurse,’ the initials ‘RN’ or any other title implying that the person is a registered nurse for a fee, salary or other consideration, or as a volunteer, without holding a current, valid license as a registered nurse under this chapter.” Therefore, having UAPs working as school nurses is practicing nursing without a license.

A licensed school nurse (LSN) is an independent practitioner not requiring direction by another health professional. LSNs can simultaneously provide independent health care; conduct public health surveillance; contribute to IHPs, IATs and IEPs; care for illness and injury; administer medication; and perform myriad other nursing tasks, all of which leads to better educational outcomes.

When school districts contract services with outside agencies for school nurses, they should make sure they are getting the most value for their expenditure by requiring the nurses be LSNs. Only in this way can they best meet the students’ health needs and promote academic success.

Fully licensed and experienced school nurses save lives and help students learn every day. For more information, contact the Ohio Association of School Nurses at (330) 749-5068 or visit [www.oasn.org](http://www.oasn.org).

*Editor’s note:* This article was written by Ohio Association of School Nurses (OASN) Executive Director **Gabrielle Karpowicz, RN, LSN**; at-large representative on the OASN Board of Directors **Joan Keith, RN, LSN** at **Upper Arlington City Schools** and a Nationally Certified School Nurse (NCSN); OASN representative to the National Association of School Nurses Board of Directors **Kathy Strasser, RN, LSN** at **Norwood City Schools** and NCSN; and OASN Past President and Legislative Liaison **Kate King, RN** and **Columbus City Schools** director of health, family and community services.



*Presenters lead a discussion on healthy schools assessments and nurse-led educational programs at the Ohio Association of School Nurses statewide conference.*

# Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Nursing Practice™

