

# *The Role of the School Nurse and*

## *School Based Health Centers*

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### *Position Statement*



*National  
Association of  
School Nurses*

#### **SUMMARY**

The National Association of School Nurses holds the position that a combination of school nursing services and school-based health centers (SBHCs) can facilitate positive health outcomes for students. SBHC services complement the work of the school nurses, who are responsible for the entire population of students, by providing a referral site for students without another medical home. SBHCs may provide primary nursing, medical, dental, mental health and other services to those students enrolled in the SBHC program. When available, SBHCs should be integrated with school nursing services to provide a continuum of health services to keep students healthy, in school, and ready to learn. Funding for SBHCs and school nurses typically comes from different sources, so the relationship should be complementary and not competitive.

#### **HISTORY**

SBHCs started during the 1970s in elementary schools to provide services to those who could not afford or access primary health care. There are now more than 1,900 SBHCs in the United States and, with parental enrollment, are available to many students. Almost all (81%) SBHCs are able to bill Medicaid for services (NASBHC 2010).

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE ISSUE**

School health services support student needs and there is a strong correlation between the presence of a SBHC and academic achievement (Vinicullo & Bradley, 2009). SBHCs improve access to care by removing barriers, including:

- lack of insurance or money,
- lack of a provider who will accept the student's insurance,
- lack of transportation to appointments, and
- inability of a parent to leave work for a student's medical appointment.

Services that are offered by SBHCs are culturally sensitive and age-appropriate and may include:

- treatment of acute illness,
- physical examinations for school entrance or sports participation,
- dental screening and treatment,
- pregnancy testing
- diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections,

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- reproductive health counseling
- mental health services
- crisis intervention
- diagnosis and interventions for learning or behavioral problems,
- nutrition counseling
- substance abuse counseling
- tobacco cessation programs,
- social services,
- laboratory testing,
- immunizations, and
- medication prescription and dispensing. (Lear, et al)

SBHCs provide students with preventative and primary health care services in school rather than in a traditional manner that includes missed days of school or parental absence from the workplace (Luehr & Selekman, 2006). Centers virtually bring the “doctor’s office” to the school, increasing classroom attendance time so that students are provided the health related support they need to succeed in the classroom (NASBHC, 2010).

## RATIONALE

School nurses are in a unique position to provide the critical link between the education system, students, families, community, and medical care. Within that framework, the school nurse should function as part of the healthcare team by assisting in the development of rationale for a SBHC, facilitating access to the full array of services to the SBHC for students, and referring and coordinating care for students who are enrolled for care in the SBHC.

The SBHC should include the school nurse in all phases of planning, implementing, and evaluating a SBHC. In addition, the SBHC should include the school nurse as a member of a team that provides health services for shared clients utilizing a holistic health approach.

As a partnership, the school nurse and the SBHC staff should develop a shared case management structure to track outcomes of care, coordinate nursing and treatment care plans for students who require follow-up care, and work together to collect data to study outcomes and cost effectiveness of care. The collaboration between the school nurse and the SBHC staff can also be aimed at the development of policies and systems that ensure the quality and confidentiality of care received by students and implement wellness and disease prevention programs to improve health outcomes for all members of the school community

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Adopted: 2001  
Revised: January 2011