

Student Access to School Nursing Services

Position Statement

NASN POSITION

It is the position of the National Association of School Nurses (NASN) that all students should have access to school nursing care by a registered, professional school nurse (hereinafter referred to as school nurse) all day, every day. For students who face barriers to accessing healthcare, especially those living in predominantly low-income, rural and minority communities, a school nurse may serve as their only regular healthcare provider. School nurses provide students, staff, and school communities with quality healthcare that is critical for health promotion, disease prevention, health maintenance, and health equity (National Academy of Medicine, 2021).

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

About 56 million students attend school in the United States; about 6% or 3.3 million do not have health insurance coverage (NCES, 2020; US Census Bureau, 2020). School nurses provide all students equitable access to healthcare when they teach, assess, and support physical and mental health, and remove barriers to community-based healthcare through care coordination and case management (Maughan et al., 2016).

Several barriers may impact a family's ability to seek medical care or advice (Johnson, 2017). This may be related to a lack of insurance or an available healthcare provider. Other barriers, such as job or transportation constraints, can impact parents' ability to take a child for treatment. Whatever the reason, the school nurse is often the healthcare provider who provides assessment and episodic care for the student. The school nurse also provides care coordination by helping families to enroll in public health insurance programs, finding a medical home and even arranging transportation to appointments (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016). Support of a school nurse may be even more essential in schools where socioeconomic and geographic disparities exist (Gratz et al., 2021).

School nurses empower students to be well; they teach, treat, counsel, and support students to increase classroom seat time and decrease trips to the health office and absences from school (Best et al., 2021). School nurses support student health in a variety of ways. School nurses may teach students how to manage their own health and wellness; monitor student immunization status, conduct vision and hearing screening, and refer students for treatment; participate in 504/IEP meetings, contribute to individualized education programs and/or develop individualized health care plans (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016). School nurses are often the first to identify and address student behavioral health concerns and serve as an early warning system for children and families in crisis or otherwise at risk of abuse and neglect. School nurses provide support and care for students with special healthcare needs/chronic conditions through care management and direct care, including medication administration and health procedures.

School nurses use their public health expertise to advocate for healthier communities by leading school wellness teams and developing health and wellness policies addressing issues such as quality air,

healthier lunches, and barriers created by health disparities (Johnson, 2017). School nurses support the school community through constant surveillance of student and staff conditions to prevent and control spread of communicable disease and prepare for and respond during emergencies (Shannon et al., 2020).

School nurses provide care and support to all students using the Framework for 21st Century Practice model (NASN, 2016). The model is student-centered and includes five nonhierarchical key principles: Standards of Practice, Care Coordination, Leadership, Quality Improvement, and Community/Public Health. The principles of the Framework help to describe many of the practice activities nurses perform each day to support student health and learning. The Framework is aligned with the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child movement and its interdisciplinary approach to student health and learning (NASN, 2020; CDC, 2014)

School nursing plays an essential role in keeping children healthy, safe, and ready to learn so that they may grow into healthy and productive adults. The school nurse is a member of a unique, specialized discipline of professional nursing and is often the sole healthcare provider in an educational setting (NASN, 2016). It is essential that all students have access to a full-time school nurse all day, every day to level the playing field with regard to health equity and to support student physical health, mental wellness and academic readiness (Council on School Health, 2016).

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Acknowledgment of Authors

Catherine F. Yonkaitis, DNP, RN, NCSN, PHNA-BC

Amy Dark, BA, BSN, RN, CSNT

Linda Compton, MS, RN

Kathey Haynie, MSN, RN

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“To optimize student health, safety, and learning, it is the position of the National Association of School Nurses that a professional registered school nurse is present in every school all day, every day.”

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National Association of School Nurses

1100 Wayne Avenue, Suite 925

Silver Spring, MD 20910

1-240-821-1130