

Education NEWS & NOTES

School Nurses: Essential But Missing In Most Schools

(NAPSA)—In today's educational environment, school nurses do far more than wipe runny noses and bandage scraped knees. These days, you may find a school nurse administering complicated drug regimens, counseling diabetic students on their diets or even cleaning and re-inserting catheter tubes.

"Nearly nine million children are uninsured," said Edward J. McElroy, president of the American Federation of Teachers. "For them, school nurses often are the only health care professional they will see."

But schools are being asked to do more with less—fewer resources and fewer school nurses. There are approximately 45,000 to serve 53 million public school students. While many experts agree that no school nurse should be responsible for more than 750 students, the current ratio is one school nurse to nearly 1,200 students.

In addition to providing basic screening and health care services such as immunizations, school nurses are also on the front lines for identifying child abuse, illegal drug use and depression. Up to 20 percent of the students in our nation's schools have chronic social, emotional or other health problems that often come to the attention of a school nurse before any other health professional.

A record 5.6 percent of all students now receive medications while at school. Often, medications have bad side effects if the dosage is not measured properly or if given at the incorrect time. Without a school nurse, many times these medications are administered by school personnel who are not trained appropriately.



For some children, school nurses are the only health care professionals they ever see.

When Dr. Pat Cooper, the school superintendent in McComb, Miss., instituted a comprehensive health program that includes a full-time nurse in every elementary school, the benefits went far beyond improved health care. In five years, the number of second graders reading on grade level jumped from 11 to 82 percent, enrollment in alternative programs for children with behavioral problems dropped by 50 percent, and students showed marked improvement in attendance.

"Students who become ill or injured at school and don't have access to a school nurse are often sent home," explains Juanita Hogan, a school nurse in the Pittsburgh school district. "This forces them to miss valuable school time and learning opportunities."

While no state currently requires a full-time school nurse in every school, some states, including New Mexico, New York and South Carolina, are considering legislation to change that.

To learn more about school nurses, visit the American Federation of Teachers' Web site at www.aft.org.